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WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT & OTHER STORIES

By

JAMES HOPPER

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WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JAMES HOPPER

Author of "Caybigan," "The Freshman," "The Trimming of Goosie," etc.; co-author of "9009"

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1913

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

"BUT where are your dolls?" said mother as she tucked Elizabeth and Maryan in their small, white beds. Though the candles were all lit within the room, the long summer twilight of Paris still lingered wanly at the windows, and there came from the streets sounds of traffic and of gaiety. "Where are your dolls? Where are Alice and Grace? Don't you sleep with your dolls to-night, babies?"

Elizabeth, who is two years older than Maryan, who is four years older than nothing, turned very quietly on her left side; Maryan, who is plumper and hence rolls more easily, capsized very abruptly on her right side. Thus, with their golden heads on their respective pillows, they were looking at each other.

"Don't we sleep with our dollies to-night?" repeated mother, her eyes searching the chairs, the dresser, the mantelpiece. "Where are they; where did you leave Grace and Alice?"

Elizabeth, looking at her sister with a frown which she tried to make quite impressive, but which succeeded in being, after all, but a very

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little frown, placed one finger on her red lips. "I don't know," she started to say; "I don't know where our——"

But chubby Maryan exploded before she knew it. "We wanted them to see the Guignol * to-night," she blurted out; "we wanted them to see the Guignol!"

"The Guignol!" exclaimed mother, astonished. "You have left them at the Guignol? In the Luxembourg Gardens? Have you, babies?"

There was a silence. Maryan lay still, rather appalled; Elizabeth squirmed, her quick mind working at the situation. Finally she decided upon a confession, and made it elaborate.

"They wanted to see more Guignol," she said. "They never have enough. Nurse always takes us away before they've had half enough. So we left them there, on a chair, in front of the little theater, so they could see the Guignol at midnight, when it is dark."

Mother turned away her head. "But the Guignol does not play at night, does it?" she said. "Polichinelle and Guillaume and all the marionettes rest at night. There is no Guignol at night."

"Yeth, there is," broke in Maryan breathlessly;

* The Guignol is the French "Punch and Judy" show.

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"yeth there is, at midnight, when no people are around."

"Yes, mama," corroborated Elizabeth. "At midnight, when the gates are closed, and no one is in the garden, and all is very still, they raise the curtain and play to the moonbeams and the little earthworms. The little earthworms stand up on their tails to see. Don't they, Elise?"

Elise emerged from the clothes-press in which she had been folding a crumply pinafore with great care. Her face was red. "Yes, madame," she said to mother. "Yes, I told them that. But I did not know they would leave their dolls. It was late to-night when we left the gardens; the drums were beating and the gates being closed. So I think the dolls must still be there, on the chair, in front of the Guignol theater."

"Well!" said mother, "well! Then, Elise, just slip across the street and see if one of the gates is not still open and if you can't get the dolls. They are pretty, and it would be too bad to—too bad if they should catch cold."

Elise hurried out of the room. Five minutes later, though, she was back; four blue eyes, already blinky with the Sandman's sowing, fixed themselves on her lips. "Madame, I am desolate," she said, "truly desolate. But all the gates are closed, and the guard says it is against

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all rules to open again after sundown. But if madame permits, I will get up very early in the morning and wait till the gates are opened, and get the dolls of mesdemoiselles."

"Yes," said mother, "if you please, do that, Elise. I'm worried about Alice and Grace."

"We'll go too," chimed two small voices, which seemed to come from far away, as through the haze of slumberland.

"Ah, no," started to say mother, but changed her mind. "If you want, you may go," she went on. "But if you do, you must go to sleep right away, right away. So, go to sleep, babies."

She kissed four blue eyes shut and passed her hand through yellow curls. She softly blew out the candles; she tiptoed out. At the door she stopped, listening. After a while there came to her a vague and tender stir, like the slight agitation that comes to one in a garden at night, from the flowers massed in the fragrant gloom. She closed the door.

An hour or two after the closing of the door, Maryan felt herself softly lifted from her warm sleep as from a nest of eider-down, and finally found herself wide awake beneath the night's black dome. Immediately, she put out her arm for her dolly—for Alice who always slept by

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her side. But there was no Alice, no sweet consoler of sudden night alarms. Without hesitation, Maryan with one double kick threw back the blankets, rolled pudgily to the floor, and pattered resolutely to the other bed, vaguely white, near by. With arms and legs, fingers and toes, like a soldier charging up a wall, she clambered up, and triumphantly slid beneath the covers, along her big sister's warm little body.

"Coo-coo, 'Lisbeth," whispered Maryan.

"Hello, Mayyan," whispered Elizabeth.

It was very dark and very still, and warm; they could not see each other, but snuggled delightedly, Maryan's round little nose against Elizabeth's little bosom. "Hello, 'Lisbeth," cooed Maryan; "Hello, Mayyan," whispered Elizabeth. It was a lark, that—to be awake with the whole world thinking you asleep. They tasted of the joy in silence, close in each other's arms.

But it is always into a Peace like this that the worm Care suddenly bites. "Where's Grace?" abruptly asked Maryan; "is Grace in your bed, 'Lisbeth?"

Elizabeth, freeing one arm, felt about her. "No," she said, astonished; "Grace isn't here; she isn't. Is she on your side?"

"No," said Maryan. And explosively: "An'

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Alice isn't in *my* bed, either. Ain't that *funny?*"

There was now in the silence a vague pulsation of trouble. Elizabeth, who had turned on her back, gazed upward reflectively. She had learned that when a toy, a book, a hat disappears, "spirited away," as it were, it is well to look back carefully at all the actions of the day. Suddenly she remembered. "Oh, don't you remember, Mayyan?" she whispered. "Don't you remember?"

"Wat?" asked Maryan flatly.

"We left our dollies in the gardens—in front of the Guignol theater—don't you remember?—to see the Guignol play at midnight."

"Ooh, yes," said Maryan, "I 'member. On a little chair, in front of the Guignol! Maybe it's playing now!"

Elizabeth was pondering. "Nope," she said finally. "It don't play at midnight. Didn't you hear mother say to Elise, 'Did you tell them that?,' and Elise said, 'Yes, madame, I told them that.' It's just one of their stories. Humph, I guess they think we believe *everything!*"

"It don't truly play, then?" asked Maryan.

"No; it's just make-believe, I guess," said Elizabeth regretfully.

There was another silence. They lay on their backs, eyes up in the darkness, thinking. "It

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must be awfully cold out there," said Maryan after a while.

"'Tain't so cold," said Elizabeth judicially; "'cause it's summer."

"Oh, yes," said Maryan, "it's summer."

"But it must be dark; dark and still and *lonely,*" pursued Elizabeth.

Again they were silent, each with a picture of a small doll alone in the big, black garden. And finally the vision grew too poignant. Maryan broke into a wail. "Ooh," wailed Maryan, "I want my little doll! I want my little doll!"

"Sh-sh, sh-sh," hissed Elizabeth gently, placing her arms tight about her little sister; "don't cry, Mayyan. Elise will get them in the morning. They'll be all right."

"But I want my little dolly," wailed Maryan beneath the covers. "I want her right now!"

"Please don't cry, Mayyan," whispered Elizabeth, squirming with agony, and kissing curls, a nose, salt tears; "oh, *please* don't cry, Mayyan."

"But I want my little doll," Maryan wailed on, still more desolately. "She's all lonely and cold. I want my little doll, *right here, right now!*"

When Maryan made known her wishes in that tone, Elizabeth knew it was little use to argue. She slid out of bed. "We'll go get them right

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now," she said resolutely. "Come on; we'll just run across the street and *get* them. They *must* be lonely."

"But it's too dark," now objected Maryan, who had stopped crying very abruptly.

"There'll be a light on the street," said Elizabeth indomitably. "Come on."

"But it's cold," said Maryan.

But now it was the bed which, without her sister, was big and cold. As she spoke she was sliding down. The two little girls stood clasped, a moment, trembling with bare feet upon the polished floor. "Let's get our shoes," said Elizabeth.

A blind fumbling along the floor, however, resulted in the finding of only two shoes. One belonged to the right foot of Elizabeth, the other to the left foot of Maryan. "Come on, that's enough," decided the optimistic elder sister. "We'll just step longer on one foot than the other."

The dollies, meanwhile, sat in the gardens, just as they had been put—on a straw-bottomed chair at the end of a line of similar chairs, beneath a big horse-chestnut tree, and facing the little Guignol theater with its closed curtain. They were used to doing what they were told, and the

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idea of disobedience never entered their small (and wooden) heads.

So they sat there, very quiet in the darkness, just as they had been placed. They leaned a bit toward each other, Alice's yellow head against Grace's dark curls; their lace petticoats peeped out beneath their pink and blue gowns and their small square slippers pointed vertically to the sky. Alice held both her hands dutifully in her lap, but Grace's right arm, bent at the elbow, raised one hand up in a Frenchy gesture, as though she were immediately about to break into an animated conversation. The big blue eyes of both, wide open in the shadow of their long lashes, were fixed unwinkingly upon the miniature theater's closed curtain, which did not stir.

When at first they had been placed there surreptitiously by their small mistresses, who immediately had scampered off after their nurse, the closing drums were beating through the alleys and nooks of the gardens, and all the people were whirling out with a liquid rustling of skirts and a dry hiss of feet. Three times the four soldiers in their high shakos had passed very close, and to the vibration of the long hollow drums, the dolls had shivered like little leaves on a cold tree. But they had not been seen. Finally the drums ceased suddenly in the distance, there had

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been a creaking of heavy gates. Now, it was very quiet.

The sun, for a last moment, gilded the tops of the chestnuts, then paled and was gone. The patches of sky visible through the trees went from pink to gray to violet black; and then through the leaves the darkness began to ooze down like a sooty rain. It splashed along the ground, spread, rose slowly till it filled the garden to the tree-tops. In the bushes, in the indistinct masses above, there was a fluttering, snuggling movement of feathery things, which diminished gradually into a complete silence. A great and aged bell began tremulously to measure off the night.

The little dolls sat motionless, though they seemed to lean a bit tighter toward each other. Their four small square feet pointed upward; Alice had her hands in her lap, Grace still held up her right arm as if about to speak; both stared faithfully at the miniature theater, now very vague in the gloom. At regular intervals, long as eternities, the air vibrated to the low resonance of the great bell and they trembled slightly.

The hours passed; the darkness and the silence deepened. The dollies leaned against each other. The black head and the yellow head were indis-

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tinguishable now. The dew began to fall; a drop of it sparkled upon a finger of Grace's uplifted hand like the bright diamond in an invisible ring. They still stared, with their candid blue eyes, at the miniature theater with its closed curtain; and shook slightly to the passing sound-ripples of the bell, whose tale each time grew longer and more profound.

At the outer door, Maryan and Elizabeth were stopped by a serious problem. The door was one of those that shut by themselves, and which, once shut, are locked to those trying to come in from the outside. If they went out and left it closed behind them, they would not be able to get in again.

Standing out on the sill, with Maryan's pudgy body holding the door ajar, Elizabeth pondered a moment on the question. The solution leaped to her mind. "Hold on," she said to Maryan, gently being squashed, and, stooping, took off her lone shoe and placed it in the jamb. "Come on," she said. Maryan disengaged herself, the door swung forward, brought up silently against the little shoe, and remained ajar. "There!" said Elizabeth with satisfaction; "now it *can't* shut. Come on." There was now but one shoe for the four small feet.

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But an automobile sliding silently along the curb threw them back in the shadow. Then a mounted Republican Guard came clattering by, his high helmet catching fiery gleams from the lamps as he passed. The horse reared at a shadow, and to the bound, the helmet's long tail rose in the air. He disappeared. "It's a dragon, ain't it?" whispered Maryan, holding tight. "No," said Elizabeth disdainfully; "just one of the 'publican things!"

The street was now deserted. "Come on," said Elizabeth breathlessly, and hand in hand, like two little white moths, they flitted across the street, to the closed gates of the Luxembourg. "There's a p'liceman," warned Maryan, very low; "there's a p'liceman."

A policeman was there, so near that they could almost touch him; a Paris policeman with red-braided cap, big cape and small sword, half standing, half sitting against the low stone wall in which the high iron rails were set, shadowy in the gloom of the overhanging tree and the drapings of his cape. But he was very still. His chin was on his chest, and at intervals there came from him a purr like that of a petted cat. "Humph," said Elizabeth contemptuously, "he's just an old snippity, sleepy one. Come on."

And going to the closed gate, she slid like an

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eel between two of the high iron bars. She was in the garden now. "Come on," she urged.

But Maryan, half in the garden, half out, was not moving. With head cocked to one side, she was carefully examining her situation. "Come on," Elizabeth repeated impatiently.

"Can't," said Maryan, at length reaching a diagnosis. "I'm sthuck."

"Oh, Mayyan!" exclaimed Elizabeth, tears of impatience coming to her eyes. "Wiggle. Why don't you wiggle!"

"Can't," repeated Maryan stolidly. "I'm sthuck."

"Do this," said Elizabeth, expelling her breath and drawing in her stomach. "Do like this, hard!"

Maryan drew in her stomach.

"*Now* wiggle!" whispered Elizabeth.

Maryan wiggled, but to no effect, for as soon as she wiggled, she forgot to hold her stomach in.

"Wait," said Elizabeth resourcefully. "Wait," And moving near, she placed both her little hands against Maryan's front, pushing it in. "Now, wiggle; quick, wiggle!" she ordered in an urgent whisper. Maryan wiggled, Elizabeth pressing with all her might. And suddenly, like a deflated rubber ball, Maryan plumped through and regained immediately her rotundity.

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"Now," said Elizabeth, with the satisfaction of a general ordering the last decisive charge—"now, come on."

Hand in hand they advanced into the garden. It was very still and very dark. They held each other close, but went on sturdily, stopping only now and then before the menace of some deeper gloom till their brave young eyes had resolved it to a bush, a tree, a form familiar and not to be feared. They passed by the tinkle of an invisible fountain, then the trees opened a bit to the vague whiteness of the starlight, and they came to the wooded arena of the Guignol.

"Let's hide behind a tree and 'prise them," suggested Maryan.

"All right, let's," acquiesced Elizabeth.

They approached to the edge of the natural amphitheater, and from behind a tree's green trunk peered carefully. At first they could see nothing. Then, little by little, the benches, the chairs, the little theater appeared, lit up by the wan light of the approaching moon—and they saw their dolls. "Ooh, *ain't* they cute!" whispered Maryan; "ooh, look at 'em; ain't they cute and nice and good!"

The dollies were still in their chair, just as they had been put. Their heads were together, their square little feet pointed uncompromisingly

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to heaven; Alice held both hands in her lap, but Grace had her right arm up as though she were about to speak; and the candid eyes of both were fixed without question upon the little theater, with its closed curtain.

"Ooh, ain't they cute!" whispered Maryan. "Aren't they good!" murmured Elizabeth. "Ain't they cute *and* good!" resumed Maryan. "Aren't they good and cute and true!" said Elizabeth. And full of a tender ecstasy, the little girls peered from behind the tree and did not move.

"Wat's *dat?*" whispered Maryan suddenly, with a start.

Behind them, somewhere in the sleeping city, a low, beautiful sound had broken like a golden bubble, and now through the gardens, through the trees, the shrubs, the masses of gloom, it was passing from end to end in a long shudder of liquid music.

"It's a bell," said Elizabeth; "it's a bell telling the time."

And as the bell, gravely doling out the hour, sent out ripple upon ripple of mellow vibration, she began to count. "Two," she said. "Three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve! Twelve!" she repeated. "It's midnight."

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"But wat's that? Wat's that?" Maryan asked again.

"It's the moon," answered Elizabeth—"the moon coming out over the houses."

It was as if suddenly a button had been pressed. The moon, emerging above a high roof, plunged into the small pit a cataract of bright light. The circle of big trees, the rows of low benches, of straw chairs, the silent little audience, the red-and-gold miniature theater shone as with a phosphorescence of their own, in a bath of bluish glory.

"But wat's that, wat's that?" again whispered Maryan, more excited than ever.

"I don't know, I don't know," Elizabeth had to say this time.

For in the silence, the more profound from the last dying murmur of the bell, there had sounded, sharp and dry, a click and a whir.

"Sounded like wings," said Maryan, trembling a bit; "sounded like a great big bird!"

"Oh," exclaimed Elizabeth, "'twas the curtain! Look, look at the curtain. Oh!"

Maryan looked at the theater. The curtain was up, and the moon shone upon the empty scene. Her little eyes opened wide as her doll's; her little mouth made a bright red O. "Ooh," she said.

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But Elizabeth was whispering in her ear. "They're going to play," said she; "they're going to play for our little dollies. Come, come, let's hide!"

And hand in hand the children withdrew a bit farther within the thickness of the trees.

For a long moment the small stage remained empty. The curtain, which had risen quite to the top, swung to and fro the slightest bit, and behind a tree two little hearts thumped like ponies at a lope. "Ooh, I don't think they will play, I don't think they will play!" whispered Maryan. And just then Polichinelle appeared.

He was resplendent in his usual gala attire. The moon shone upon him, and to the light, the hump on his chest, covered with blue silk, the hump on his back, covered with yellow silk, and the hump on his big nose, red with drinking too much wine, shone like the colored globes of incandescent lights. He came on to the stage, though, without his usual bound; without any fuss at all, very quietly. Under his arm he held a feather duster. He took the duster in both hands and began to dust the stage.

He hopped about busily, very serious, and dusted the floor, the wings, the cardboard trees, the cardboard sky. The duster swung about like a derrick, dust arose, Polichinelle almost disap-

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peared in an atmosphere of powdered gold. "Whee, whee, whee," he whistled between his teeth, as he worked; "whee, whee, whee."

Suddenly, he stopped in the midst of a gesticulation, his duster poised in the air. He remained immobile a moment, then with decision quietly placed the duster upon the floor and came forward to the edge of the stage. Leaning far out, as from a window, he placed his right hand against the side of his nose and again went motionless in deep contemplation. He was looking at the two little dolls sitting in their chair.

"Humph!" he grunted after a while, and straightened up. "Guignol!" he called with his funny voice, no thicker than an onion skin. "Guignol, Guignol!" he called downward.

And Guignol immediately sprang up with his funny cocked hat and his good, stupid face. Polichinelle nudged him, and pointed. Guignol raised his arms in a gesture of surprise. "Guillaume," he called downward. "Guillaume, Guillaume!"

And Guillaume hopped upon the stage in his blouse and belt, his hands in his pockets, rascally as ever. Up went his hands as he saw the dolls, in a gesture mocking that of his father, Guignol. Then, "Police!" he cried; "police, police, help!"

Upon the stage walked a miniature Paris po-

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liceman, with his cap, cape and little sword. Very curiously he examined the dolls from the distance, and knew right away what to do. "Monsieur le juge," he called, "Monsieur le juge!"

And "Mister the Judge" came on in his square cap and black gown, spectacles upon his nose. The five small figures seemed to be conferring, their heads together. They vanished and returned with bits of strings and diminutive ladders. Hooking the ladders, tying the strings as firemen do ropes, they slid down the front of the theater to the ground, and then came hopping toward the dolls like grasshoppers. Climbing up the chair, they made a circle about Alice and Grace and gravely began to confer over them, like botanists about a new flower.

"They are lost children, I opine," said the policeman. "My colleagues of the big world often find them thus, stuck away in gardens and things. It's novel-reading does it."

"In that case," said the judge with a little cough, "your duty is clear. You must take them to a station and keep them till their mother comes weeping."

"They're girls," said Guillaume the gamin. "I'll pull their hair. Isn't it long and bright!"

But Polichinelle, who had not said a word,

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and who had been examining the dolls attentively, suddenly leaned over toward Alice and with his stiff little hand struck her red cheek a smart tap.

("Ooh!" said Elizabeth, behind the tree; "Ooh!" said Maryan. And indignantly Maryan started forward; but Elizabeth held her back. "Sh-sh," she hissed. "Let's wait.")

"Did you hear that?" said Polichinelle, rising straight like a wise old professor demonstrating to his class. "Did you hear the sound that gave?"

"Hum, hum, very interesting," said the judge. "Brilliant!" said honest Guignol. "My faith!" said the policeman. "Hit harder," said the rascally young Guillaume.

"And now listen," said Polichinelle. Bending over, he struck the innocent Grace a similar tap. "Did you hear that?" he asked triumphantly.

("Ooh," said Elizabeth, behind the tree; "Ooh," said Maryan. And Elizabeth started forward indignantly; but Maryan held her back. "Sh-sh," she hissed; "let's wait.")

"Curious," murmured the judge. "As a matter of fact——" said the diminutive policeman. "What insight!" said Guignol. And Guillaume said, "Sounds like wood."

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"And now," said Polichinelle, in the tone of one announcing his last clinching argument. His small stiff hand went up in the air again—and came down hard across the face of Guillaume. "Aouch!" yelled Guillaume.

("Ha-ha," chortled Elizabeth, behind the tree; "Ha-ha," chortled Maryan.)

"Did you hear that?" said Polichinelle, strutting with satisfaction. "Did you hear that?"

"We did, we did," said Guignol, the judge and the policeman.

"And what do you make of it all?" said the pompous little figure, crossing his arms importantly on his front hump.

They did not answer. They could not answer.

Patiently, Polichinelle repeated his demonstration. He tapped successively Alice and Grace, and then gave poor Guillaume another whack. "How about it now?" he asked.

"It all sounds alike," said Guignol, suddenly illumined. "It all sounds alike!"

"Of course," said Polichinelle. "Of cou-ourse. These are not human children. They are of wood, like us! They are of wood, hence they have souls. They have souls, hence they are like us. They are like us, hence they are of us. They are of us, hence they are ours. They are ours!

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We'll take them with us. They'll be of our troupe."

"Of course, of course, of course," assented all the others. "I'll pull their hair," murmured Guillaume; "isn't it fine and long!"

"Hop," cried Polichinelle. "Hop; bear a hand, up with them!"

The marionettes took the dolls by the hands, ran to the theater with them, climbed up its front by their ladders and ropes, and disappeared behind the curtain, which immediately snapped shut. There was a small tumult, then a great silence. And the moon went out behind a thick cloud.

"Did you ever!" Elizabeth managed to say.

"They took our dolls!" said Maryan, appalled. "They went and took away our little dollies!"

"Did you ever!" repeated Elizabeth with rising vigor.

They stood behind the tree, holding hands very tight, and looked. The auditorium was now vague with gloom. It stirred to no movement, and there was not a sound. The incredible scene they had witnessed had not left a ripple. "Maybe it didn't happen," suggested Maryan in a whisper; "maybe it didn't truly happen, 'Lisbeth!"

"Maybe it's make-believe," chimed Elizabeth,

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springing at the hope; "maybe it's all make-believe!" Their two worlds, the real one and the make-believe, were of equal vividness and frequently overlapped.

"Maybe it didn't happen, and our dollies are there still!" persisted Maryan.

"Let's go see," said Elizabeth.

Hand in hand they wandered, a bit uncertainly, into the small amphitheater. They groped about the chairs, along the benches, but the dolls were not there. "Dee ain't there," whispered Maryan. "No, they aren't," agreed Elizabeth disconsolately.

It was dark and still. The trees, above, rustled slightly. And the marionette theater, hardly visible, had its curtain closed like the mouth of a man who is angry and doesn't want to speak.

"Let's call them," suggested Elizabeth.

"Yeth, let's call them," agreed Maryan.

Putting their heads very close, like two opera singers on a last note which they like, they called together—at first tremulously, then more firmly. "Alice; Grace," they called. "Al-i-i-ice; Gra-a-a-ace!"

Up to that time, be it noticed, through their long wait, through the debate held over them, through their palpitating adventure, the dollies had not uttered a single word. But now, to the

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golden call of their little mamas, each with a pang suddenly found her voice. From the depths of the miniature theater, their answers came immediate and true. "Ma-ma; ma-ma!" cried Alice. But Grace got mixed up, and used the wrong half of her vocabulary. "Pa-pa; pa-pa!" she cried.

"They're there, in the theater," said Elizabeth.

"Yeth, they is," chimed Maryan emphatically; "they *was* stolen, wasn't they?"

"The bad old thieves!" exclaimed Elizabeth, tears rising to her eyes. "I'll get 'em, you just see!" And walking to the marionette theater, she knocked upon its front.

At the third knock, the curtain whirred upward, and Polichinelle stood at the opening. Elizabeth could not repress a frank laugh at the sight of her old friend. "Now, mister," she said, "*now* I've caught you. You just give us back our dollies."

But Polichinelle seemed very serious and unbending. "Your dollies?" he said, jerking his head with a short sideways nod toward them. "Your dollies, you said?"

"Yes," said Elizabeth sternly, "we want our dollies."

"Yeth, thir," echoed Maryan, "our dollies.

"I'm very sorry," said Polichinelle with stiff

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politeness, "but I haven't your dollies. So now, good-night."

Down he dropped out of sight, and down came the curtain.

"Well!" ejaculated Elizabeth, suffocated; "well!" And without hesitation she began knocking again at the front of the little theater.

Once more the curtain whirred upward, and once more Polichinelle appeared. "Well, what is it, little girls?" he asked as though it was the first time he saw them.

"We want our dolls," repeated Elizabeth and Maryan in unison.

"Your dolls?" whined Polichinelle, pretending to be quite astonished; "why, what would your dolls be doing here, at this time of the night —eh, little girls?"

"Now, Polichinelle, old Polichinelle, stop your fooling," said Elizabeth pertly. "Just give us our dolls——"

"Why, my sweet little ladies," said Polichinelle, his head leaning sideways on his right shoulder—"why, my sweet little ladies, *I* haven't your dolls; so now good-night!" And down he flopped out of sight as the curtain slid shut.

"Ooh!" said Elizabeth. "Ooh!" said Maryan. And immediately they both began knocking again.

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The curtain whirred up; Polichinelle reappeared. "What is it, little girls?" he asked, nodding toward them. "What is it?"

"We want our dolls!" screamed Elizabeth and Maryan.

Polichinelle threw both his arms upward and protruded his front hump. "What mad little girls!" he cried. "What *mad* little girls! Why, *we* haven't your dolls. *They* are not here——"

"Pa-pa; ma-ma!" Two sweet voices suddenly sounded from the inside depths of the little theater. "Pa-pa; ma-ma! Ma-ma; pa-pa! Pa-pa; ma-ma!"

"Now, mister," said Elizabeth triumphantly. "Now!" said Maryan.

Polichinelle looked crestfallen. "Hey, there!" he shouted downward. "Hey, there, Guignol! can't you keep them still?"

Guignol's rough voice rose from below. "When I sit on one, the other screams 'Ma-ma'; when I sit on that one, the other cries 'Pa-pa,'" he complained.

"We were saying"—Polichinelle turned back to the children solemnly—"we were saying——"

"You are a fibber!" said Elizabeth firmly. "You have been fibbing to us."

"Yeth, thir!" chimed Maryan, standing with chubby legs far apart. "You'se a fibber!"

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"Ahem," said Polichinelle, coughing discreetly. "Ahem. Well, it does not matter," he went on, losing all pretense to politeness. "Because, my little girls, you can not have your dolls. You *can not have your dolls,*" he repeated, making each word very distinct.

"We will, too," said Elizabeth as firmly.

"No, little ladies. Because we have adopted them. They belong to our troupe now."

"You can't 'dopt our dollies," protested Maryan defiantly.

"We have," said Polichinelle. "They are of wood; hence they have souls; hence they are of us."

"They aren't wood!" cried Elizabeth. "They're porcelain!"

Polichinelle scratched his big nose. "Well, they're hard, anyway, just like us. And your kind is soft and rubbery and pillowy. So now, good-night."

He disappeared; the curtain dropped.

The little girls stood silent a moment, looking at each other; then Elizabeth leaped forward toward the theater. "Beat the wall," she ordered, like a general leaping into a breach. "Beat it, Maryan; beat it, kick it!"

And the little maids, standing close, began beating a dreadful tattoo upon the thin wooden

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front of the theater. They couldn't kick with three of the feet, because those three were bare, and it hurt; but the one little foot (Maryan's) which was shod did very well indeed, and above it four pudgy fists rose and fell like the rounded ends of kettledrum sticks. The little theater rocked as in a gale; it resounded like small thunder.

But there came from it no shout, no sound, no movement, no sign of life. Gradually the small leg that had a shoe slowed its swing, tired, and was still. Gradually four small arms became listless, till finally they dropped straight down, too heavy to be held up. The little girls looked at each other, panting and desolate.

"I know," said at length the indomitable Elizabeth. "I'll just climb in! I'll get a chair and climb into their old theater!"

Going behind the benches, she got a chair and placed it against the front of the Guignol. The chair trembled. "You hold it, and I'll climb up," said Elizabeth. "All right; you climb up and I'll hold it," agreed Maryan, and took hold firmly. Elizabeth climbed up. She took hold of the lower edge of the curtain and sent it flying upward.

The edge of the stage of the little theater was now at the height of her heart. She leaned in-

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ward and looked. It was very dark; merely an empty black hole. After a while, though, she discerned, away down in a corner, an indistinct disorder of small arms and legs. "I see you," she announced down the hole; "oh, I see you all right!" And, placing her bare foot along the sill, she prepared to climb in.

But from the black hole below, Polichinelle suddenly soared up and confronted her. Leaning over, and without losing any time or speech, he seized her ankle between his stiff arms and tugged to make it slip off. Tiny as he was, he was very strong; strong with a squirmy kind of strength, like an eel's. But Elizabeth resisted resolutely; laughing, she crooked her heel about the border and clung on. Polichinelle began to yell. "Guignol; Guillaume!" he cried. "Guignol! Police! Everybody! Come up quick! *A moi! A moi!* Help! Help!—"

To his cries the whole population of the theater suddenly came springing upward with a zipping sound, and stood there in line before Elizabeth—Guignol, the rascally Guillaume, the policeman with his cap, cape and sword, the judge in his robe. "Lay hold! Lay hold!" cried Polichinelle.

Standing in line, elbow to elbow, the five little creatures, with the discipline of good workingmen picking up a heavy iron rail, stooped to-

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gether and laid hold of Elizabeth's leg. "One—two—three!" cried Polichinelle. The five little backs rose together, there were five little grunts, five little sighs, Elizabeth's leg rose slowly from the sill—and she found herself standing again with both feet upon the chair.

"Wat's dee matter?" Maryan whispered from below. "Can't you get in?"

Elizabeth was standing on the chair, panting. "Yes, I can!" she shouted suddenly, and with the words sprang again to the attack. Again she was able to throw one leg over the sill. But she got no farther. Immediately the five marionettes threw themselves upon her like small furies. They pushed and they heaved; they puffed and snorted. And as, for a moment, dazed, she relaxed with eyes shut tight, "One-two-three!" shouted Polichinelle, and the five, stooping, picked up her leg—and Elizabeth again was standing with both feet upon the chair!

She was breathing very hard and her cheeks were flushed, and in her eyes were tears very hard to hold back. "You're bad, bad things," she said; "bad, bad things!"

And with dignity, she climbed off the chair, took Maryan by the hand, and withdrew into the darkness among the trees. The marionettes disappeared; the curtain closed.

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The little girls stopped behind the trees, like a routed army rallying. Elizabeth was holding herself very stiff; much stiffer than Napoleon after Waterloo, although inside she felt just as badly as he did. Maryan began to weep softly in the gloom. Elizabeth threw her arms about her. "Don't cry," she begged; "oh, Mayyan, don't cry!" She was thinking very hard, and as fast as she could. Suddenly she knew. "I know!" she whispered. "I know what we can do!"

Maryan immediately ceased crying and turned up to her big sister two big eyes round with confidence.

"I'll get on the chair," said Elizabeth, "and pretend to climb in, and when they are all there pushing me off, you can run around and get in by the little side-door!"

"Oh," exclaimed Maryan, full of admiration. "Oh, yeth! The little door what the man came out of!"

On the side of the marionette theater, there was a slim door, which when shut disappeared; and out of it several times after performances they had seen a man emerging mysteriously—a slight, thin man with white face and very black hair.

"Come on," said Elizabeth, and hand in hand they went back across the auditorium. "I'll

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climb up," Elizabeth repeated, to make sure of the plans, "and you hold the chair. Then, when you see them all there, pushing me off, every one of them, you just run around and get in by the door. Then you just hold it open and yell to me, and I'll run around, too, and we'll both be in!"

"With our dollies," concluded Maryan.

"Yes," said Elizabeth. "Hold the chair."

She climbed upon the chair, whisked up the curtain with decision, and proceeded to climb in. Immediately she felt herself attacked by the marionettes as by a swarm of bees. She swayed, half resisting, half laughing to herself, but listening intently. And finally from within, right beneath her, there sounded Maryan's cooing call. She dropped from the chair, whisked around the corner, saw the door ajar, and plunged within. Right away she felt Maryan by her side, and took her hand.

They stood within, close, a little breathless. It was dark, but they could feel they were in a small place. Above them, a rectangular patch of lighter darkness, they could see the open front of the stage, like a window open upon a very black night. The marionettes were not there. They must have tumbled down again, must be at the very moment down here, at their feet. But there was no sound and no movement.

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Suddenly, as if an electric light had been turned on, the moon broke through the clouds, and a big golden gob of it, coming through the open front of the stage, fell within in a noiseless splash upon the floor. The small interior was illumined. "Ooh!" cried Maryan, palpitating, "my dolly, my dolly!"

In a corner, upon the floor and against the wall, Grace and Alice were sitting side by side. They leaned slightly against each other, brown curls against yellow curls, big eyes opened bluishly beneath long lashes. Alice had both hands in her lap, but Grace had one hand up as though she were just about to speak. And before them, like an old schoolmaster, his hand holding a cat-o'-nine-tails behind his back, there stood Guillaume, the gamin, child of Paris, gutter-snipe and irrepressible jester. "*Chat;* spell *chat,*" he was saying. But Alice and Grace kept their big, astonished eyes upon him and said nothing. They were Americans, and in their country a *chat* was known as a *cat,* so they couldn't very well spell it. "Rat, then," went on Guillaume; "spell rat!" But he pronounced it "rah" because he was French, and so they kept staring at him and said nothing.

Nearer, in a belligerent line, stood Polichinelle, Guignol, the judge and the policeman.

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"Aha, Mr. Polichinelle," cried Elizabeth. "*Now* will you give us our dolls?"

"I have told you," said Polichinelle severely and distinctly, "that those dolls are not dolls and that they now belong to our troupe."

"It is an indubitable fact," put in the judge, "that when one taps them on the cheek it sounds like wood." In spite of this sentence, though, he did not seem quite sure of himself.

But the policeman was. "You must respect the law, Mesdemoiselles," he admonished.

"Besides, there are more of us," said Guignol.

And Guillaume, throwing his impudent nose over his shoulder, said: "I *like* them; look at those eyes; aren't they big and fine!"

Elizabeth was now thoroughly aroused. She leaned forward, her hand whisked out, lit upon Polichinelle's shoulder, and jerked him, loose-limbed, toward her. "Here," she cried breathlessly to Maryan; "here, Mayyan, sit on him! Quick!"

But Polichinelle was squirmy as an eel: "Why don't *you* sit down on him?" objected Maryan, not relishing the work.

"No, no. You do it. Quick! 'Cause you're fatter!"

And so, while Elizabeth held the little demon with all her might, Maryan got above him and

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abruptly sat down where he was. "Aouch! aouch!" cried Polichinelle, feeling his bumps go all awry. "Aouch! Aouch!"

"Will you give us our dolls? Will you give us our dolls?" asked Elizabeth threateningly.

"Aouch! Aouch! You're straightening my bumps, you're straightening my bumps!" cried Polichinelle.

"Will you give us our dolls?"

"No! No! No!"

"Sit down on him again, Mayyan!"

Maryan stood up for the fraction of a second, and plumped down again, hard.

"Aouch! Aouch!" cried Polichinelle. "Aouch! Aouch!"

"Well, then, give us our dolls!"

"No! No! Aouch! Aouch!"

Guignol and the judge and the policeman were looking on petrified. They were used to act only on Polichinelle's orders, and Polichinelle, saying alternately "No, no," and "Aouch, aouch," taking breath only to have it knocked out of him again, had no time to give orders. The rascally Guillaume, his hands on his stomach, was laughing his fool head off at his master's plight.

So all was going very well, when a catastrophe took place.

On a shelf above, a little woolen mouse sud-

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denly came to life. Placing her tiny paws upon her pointed muzzle, she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, left the shelf, and then, straight as if let down on a string, or following an invisible track, she slid down head first along the wall, to the floor, and then along the floor toward Elizabeth and Maryan. The children did not see her till she appeared between them. Maryan sprang to her feet, letting Polichinelle free; Elizabeth sprang backward, letting Polichinelle free; and Polichinelle, with great presence of mind, made one leap toward his companions, while the mouse, keeping on her straight way, slid across the floor, then up the opposite wall, to the other shelf, upon which she immediately went lifeless again.

Polichinelle was quite cocky now. He had taken Guignol by one arm and the judge by the other, the policeman completing the chain, and they stood thus like a barrier between the children and the dolls. "You can't get the dolls," he smirked; "you can't get the dolls! You can't get the dolls because"—with a toss of the head he pointed his long nose to the shelf above him—"because, besides the woolly mouse, there is a woolly dog, and besides the woolly dog, there is a woolly cat, and besides the woolly cat, there is a cro-co-dile with a great, big, long, red mouth."

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The woolly dog on the shelf woke up, said, "Bow-wow" and went to sleep again; the woolly cat woke up and said, "Me-ah-oo-oo," and went to sleep again; and a long alligator opened his red mouth and shut it again with a great clack.

"You see?" said Polichinelle.

"I'll thank you for our dolls, please," said Elizabeth, keeping stiff an upper lip which was a bit tremulous. "I'm not afraid of your old animals. They're just make-believe."

"Make-believe!" cried Polichinelle angrily. "Make-believe! And what are you but make-believe? What are we all but make-believe? What is everything but make-believe? Make-believe! I like that! Don't you dare call anything of mine make-believe!"

"I'll thank you for our dolls, please," repeated Elizabeth with pinched lips.

Then she turned around, astonished, for the four marionettes suddenly had raised their bent arms above their heads as if to ward off a blow, as if some one were threatening to hit them, and in their averted faces was a great dread. She had made no movement toward them, so she turned to see what Maryan might be doing. Maryan was standing with pudgy feet apart; little lines were springing all over her smooth face like ripples on a lake; her mouth was slowly opening to a

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round O; her small clenched hands were rising gradually from her sides. They reached her eyes, snuggled comfortably within their orbits, and then a long, loud, sad wail filled the interior of the little theater. "I want my dolly!" wailed Maryan. "Ooh, ooh, ooh, I want my little doll! I want my little doll!"

"Oh, Mayyan," cried Elizabeth, springing toward her; "oh, Mayyan, don't cry!"

But as her glance, thrown wrathfully over her shoulder, lit upon the marionettes, she was still.

A strange thing was happening. Polichinelle was squirming; Guignol was squirming; the judge was squirming; the policeman was squirming. They stood there, making horrid faces, twisting their bodies in all sorts of shapes, standing first on one foot, then on the other as if the floor were at white heat. They acted as though they had swallowed a very hot potato, or had put their noses, by mistake, in their grandmother's snuffbox. "Aouch! aouch!" they cried; "aouch!" And young Guillaume, bending over with both hands on his stomach, wept big wooden tears which rolled along the floor like marbles.

"I want my little doll!" wailed Maryan.

The woolen dog upon the shelf awoke and began to squirm; the woolen cat awoke and began

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to squirm; the crocodile opened his big red mouth, and left it open imploringly toward heaven; the little mouse on the other shelf began to dance on one hind foot.

"I want my little doll; I want my little doll!" cried Maryan.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Polinchinelle at last managed to squeeze out between squirmings and grittings of teeth. "Stop it! Stop it! Oh, stop it!"

"I want my little doll! I want my little doll!" wailed Maryan, and the marionettes twisted like saints on a grill, or like little devils in holy water.

"Go on; keep on crying," whispered Elizabeth, who was beginning to understand. "Cry all you want to, Mayyan." And, then, to Polichinelle: "What's the matter, Polichinelle; what's the matter, old Polichinelle?"

"Oh, you know very well, you know very well," screamed Polichinelle, as he squirmed and danced an agonized jig, and the others twisted and jumped, and Guillaume dropped tears like marbles upon the floor. "Oh, you know very well, you know very well! You know we can't stand children's crying. We're used to making them laugh. Oh, you know very well, you know very well! Stop it! It hurts! It hurts!"

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"Well, then, if we stop it, will you give us our dolls?" asked Elizabeth calmly.

Polichinelle opened his mouth in a sort of spasm. But just then, Maryan became so curious as to what he would answer that she stopped crying. The marionettes gave a last hop and then stood still; the woolly cat and the woolly dog and the woolly mouse went dead; the crocodile's imploring mouth closed like a tired trap; and Polichinelle, wiping the sweat off his brow, said: "No! Of course not! Why should I give you those dolls? They are of wood, and——"

"Cry," said Elizabeth to Maryan. "Quick, Mayyan, cry some more!"

Maryan's mouth opened wide; her fists rose to her eyes. "I want my little do-o-oll!" she began again. "I want my little doll! Oo-ooh, I want my little doll!"

Polichinelle stiffened as though he had the lockjaw; he bent backward till the tip of his cocked hat touched his heels; everything started squirming and dancing most unhappily; the wee mouse rose up on her left hind foot. "Will you give us our dolls, eh? Will you give us the dolls?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes, yes!" Polichinelle screeched finally. "Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" And springing toward Alice, he took her by the hand and, sup-

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porting her by her waist, led her to Maryan's feet. Stooping swiftly, Maryan gathered her up to her bosom.

She was weeping still, now; but it was a soft weeping, mixed with sounds of kisses and murmurings, which did not seem to hurt anybody very much. The marionettes, in fact, seemed rather to enjoy it. They stood there in a line, their heads cocked to one side and regarded her attentively, a grave and gentle light in their eyes.

"And now, *my* doll, if you please," said Elizabeth briskly.

"Oh," said Polichinelle, "that one we will keep."

"Oh, no, you don't," said Elizabeth. "If you don't give it to me right now, I'll cry."

Polichinelle moved up to her and looked up searchingly into her eyes. "I don't believe," he said; "I don't believe—I don't believe—no, sir, you can't cry!"

Elizabeth opened her mouth, puckered up her face, but she couldn't. Whenever she tried, the picture of these absurd little people twisting and squirming sprang to her mind, and she could only laugh. She looked Polichinelle in the eyes, and laughed.

"I'll ask Mayyan to cry for me," she said.

Small murmurs were still coming from

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Maryan. A tear big as a star trembled at the end of one of her eyelashes, and the corners of her mouth quivered uncertainly. Polichinelle threw one sharp inspecting look at her. "Never mind," he said hastily, "I'll give you the doll."

They were all good friends now, and had a good chat; then Elizabeth decided it was about time to go home. It was indeed time to go home. A suspicious milkiness already was coming into the sky, and there was in the air that slight, cool breath which runs around the world ahead of the sun. Polichinelle, though, would not let them go alone; he insisted that the policeman accompany them. "You see," he explained, looking up at Elizabeth; "it is not the custom in France, as it is in America, for young ladies to be out, at night, alone, in the garments—well—in the garments that one wears in the night."

"But," said Elizabeth, remembering probably something she had heard some one else say sometime; "but," said Elizabeth, hugging Alice tight, "remember that I have with me my badge of respectability."

Polichinelle gave her a scared glance. "Well," he concluded; "you had better let my policeman go with you."

So, as Elizabeth and Maryan departed, each with her dolly in her arms, the little fellow went

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with them, with his cap, cape and sword, running alongside of them, no higher than a rat. They went through the damp, fragrant garden, squeezed through the gates, crossed the street——

The big, real policeman who had been asleep at the gates when Elizabeth and Maryan had gone in was still asleep there. He started up now, rubbed his eyes, looked up and down the street. By the time, though, his eyes had been rubbed so they could really see, there was nothing on the street—nothing but a wan pallor of dawn, and a milk cart in the distance.

"That was queer," he said alôud to himself; "that was *queer*. I thought I saw two little angels passing by. And me with them—me." He struck his chest. "Me, with my cap, cape and sword, running along no bigger"—he stooped, placed his hand a foot above the pavement—"no bigger than *that!*" He straightened. "That's what one gets," he went on, "for sleeping on one's post. Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!" And swinging his arms he began to pace his beat very alertly.

When the children woke up, it was immediately to hug their dolls, lying by them on the pillow. Then, looking up, they saw their nurse, Elise. She was sitting on a chair, between the two beds, as though waiting for them to wake.

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She had her jacket and hat on, and looked very much excited and scared. "Where did you get your dolls?" she said quickly. "Where, when, how? quick, tell me!"

And so they told her what had passed in the night.

While they told, she was pacing up and down the room. Finally, she disappeared within the clothes-press and rummaged there a while. When she reappeared her mind seemed to be made up. "Why, you dear children," she said, "you dreamed that. It was only a dream. Just a dream."

The children were sitting up in their beds, Elizabeth hugging Grace, Maryan hugging Alice. The sun was pouring into the room, and they blinked in the golden light. Their red lips parted at this statement. They sat thinking. "No," Elizabeth said softly, "no, it wasn't a dream."

"'Twa'n't a dream," echoed Maryan.

"But, you dear children, of course it was, of course it was, of course it was," said Elise.

"'Twasn't a dream," repeated Elizabeth slowly. "Because if it was, then, how would we have our dolls, our little dollies, right here, then?"

"Yeth," said Maryan, "they'se right here, ain't dee?"

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Elise gulped, and then stiffened. "Why, Elizabeth, Maryan," she said, "it was *I* that got the dolls. I went out this morning early and got them from the bench in the gardens where you left them last night. Don't you remember how I told your mother last night that I would get them? Well, I did. I went out early this morning and got them. And that is all a dream about your getting them. Wasn't it a fine dream? Do you often dream that way?"

Elizabeth broke into a frank laugh. "Wasn't that a funny old dream!" she cried; "wasn't it a funny old dream!"

"Wa'n't it funny!" chimed Maryan.

All the same, when Elise got them up to give them their bath, she found both of Elizabeth's feet simply disreputable. It was as if Miss Elizabeth had been dancing in a bin full of very black coal. And Maryan's right foot was just the same. But her left foot wasn't. It was a nice pinky white. Elise raised her brows, but said nothing.

"It is simply wonderful," said mother to father (they were dining together a few days later, at a small table beneath a soft red lamp)—"it is simply wonderful how these children love each other! It scares me almost at times. It is beautiful and marvelous. Why, do you know

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that they have got to the point of dreaming the same dreams?"

"No!" said father, looking up quizzically; "no! is that really so?"

"Yes," said mother solemnly. "The other night, they dreamed the same dream. They both told me of it—a wonderful dream."

"Might be," said father, "a case of telepathy. Unless"—he paused, and a light came within his eyes—"unless Miss Elizabeth should have drilled her little sister!"

"Oh! Frank!" said mother disapprovingly.

So now, nobody knows what truly happened, in the night excepting Elise, who will not tell.

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A JUMBLE IN DIVINITIES

PERE CESAR stood in the center of the court-yard, finishing his nightly inspection of his property—his "biens" he called it, his "goods"—the goods torn from the bowels of the earth by the toil of him and his fathers. The weary winter sun had set, leaving a last flamboyant streamer on the western horizon; and now even that was dying out into limp, gray cloud-rags, and upon the fields, undulating in shiny humid black clods, the night was falling like rain, a rain of smutty streaks, impalpable but visible, and of penetrating melancholy.

Standing there in the center of the court, gnarled, bowed and knotted, Père César was passing his eyes over the low, thatched buildings, stopping at each barred door, at each close-shuttered window, and his ears, no less vigilant, absorbed sounds, customary sounds, sounds that should be:—the cackle of the fowl, diminishing gradually, but with sudden inexplicable shrill outbursts farther and farther apart, into sleepy, restful cawings; the grunting of the pigs, muffled in the lethargy of gorged stomachs; the placid,

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measured crunch of hay in the barns. An austere satisfaction filled his soul. "Ben," he said in his patois French; "good, one can go to bed now," and did not move. "Ben, one can go to bed now," he repeated.

But suddenly, as he was beginning to turn on his heel, his shoulders hunched up and his head snapped forward, while his right hand rose above his eyes in a shield as if he were in the sunlight and not in the damp darkness of that early winter evening. He moved forward three steps, his eyes piercing the obscurity, and then the court was vibrant with his shouts:

"Jacquot! Jacquot! Come here! Right away! Jacquot!"

"Oui papa, oui papa!" answered a shrill, high voice, and around the corner of the main building there darted a little boy, a ludicrous figure in the indistinct light, consisting almost wholly of an immense pair of baggy trousers falling in scare-crow flaps and folds from the armpits to within four inches of the wooden shoes clattering loosely about the bare feet. "Oui papa, oui papa," he piped as he ran; and "oui papa," he said again as he stood before his father; and all these "oui papas" seemed to tell of a conscience not absolutely at peace.

"And what is that, eh, this ladder at your

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window?" growled Père César in his scolding voice. "What is it, this new foolishness of putting ladders at the windows to draw all the vagabonds of the country to this house? Will you take it down, and quick, too—you little possessed of the devil!"

"Oui papa," said Jacquot meekly. He trotted around the wall, and sure enough, in the shadow of the eaves a ladder stood, its upper rung close to a little round window in the sloping roof. Slowly, with a limpness, a discouragement in his movements due to something more subtle than the material weight of the object, Jacquot let the ladder come down to the ground and began to drag it toward the barn. A sudden flare of light tore across the court; there was a resounding slam, followed by a return of the darkness, and Jacquot, turning his head, saw that he was alone. A strange hesitation possessed him; the ladder jerked along a little farther, then stopped. For a moment Jacquot stood in his straw-stuffed left shoe, his right leg drawn up; then for another minute in his right shoe, his bare left foot rubbing pensively the burden-bearing calf. He scratched his head, dropped back the suspended foot into its empty "sabot," and stood solidly, with legs apart, while illicit resolution set his heart a-pound. Then the ladder be-

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gan to drag again, but back along the track it had made; silently, in the shadow, the upper rung rose in a quarter circle and settled lightly below the round window; the ladder stood again where it had been.

"That poor little Jesus," said Jacquot; "his wings may be tired when he gets here, and then he can climb in."

He stood there a moment, irresolute. "That poor little Jesus," he murmured again, pityingly. And this repetition successfully placing him in the compassionate mood necessary to balance certain prickings of conscience, he slipped into the house.

Beneath the light of the lamp, with bowed heads Père César and the woman-of-all-work employed since the death, nearly two years before, of Jacquot's mother, were eating the evening soup. Jacquot quietly took his wooden bowl and climbed the ladder to the garret. "Bon soir, père," he said, as he raised the trap-door.

"Bon soir, Jacquot," said the father, less severely than was his wont; "to-morrow we'll go to the Christmas mass together."

"Oui papa," said Jacquot, and he disappeared behind the trap.

Once in his little, bare, sloped-roofed room, the first thing Jacquot did was to poke his arm

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out of the window. His fingers closed upon the last rung of the ladder. "That poor little Jesus," he said again, tenderly.

He moved to a corner of the room, and there were sounds of fumbling in some sort of a box. This was followed by a sharp, scratching noise, a small explosion, and the round, brown head of the lad appeared in the light of a candle. Jacquot set the bit of tallow upon the window sill and eyed it with concern. It had burned down considerably; in fact, there was left only a three-inch stump, all surrounded with drip stalactites. Jacquot frowned; then his cheeks puffed round, and out went the light. He sat down on the floor and ate his supper in the dark.

When he had finished he relit the precious bit of tallow and again searched in the rough box in the corner. From it he took several large sheets of coarse yellow wrapping paper and two pieces of charcoal. He eyed these with the same thoughtful concern he had given the candle, then, quickly dropping to the floor with his back against the wall below the window, pulling up his knees almost to his nose, he began to draw.

He drew awkwardly, with short, rusty, uncertain strokes, but with a funny intensity of effort. His eyes, beneath his wild forelock of brown hair, were closed to little slits; his tongue bulged

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out against his right cheek, and his naked toes (he had slipped off his sabots) doubled up in vague, primordial branch-grasping movements. Now and then he held off his work and contemplated it critically, then, "Zut!" he exclaimed impatiently, and wetting his fingers in his mouth, he smeared out the whole thing and began anew. This process was not without its inconveniences, and soon his hands, his mouth, his tanned cheeks were streaked with shadows that did not dance to the uncertain light; and it was an amusing picture:—this little lad smudged with charcoal, huddled up against the wall, lost in his immense trousers, his mouth all screwed up with effort, drawing, drawing, drawing, impelled by some vague unrest within him, some obscure yearning that allowed him no peace and tortured him ever. It was rather fine, something mysterious, with a sacredness to it—the eclosion of a talent, the vague wing-stirrings of genius. There in the garret of that lonely chaumière, alone, unwitnessed, with none to teach nor encourage nor praise, in that vacuum of indifference, cold, night, solitude, the little lad, in splendid self-reliance, strove to create. The Angel of the Ideal had touched him with its white wing, and rest was his no more. From now on, till Death, he must struggle, burning with a thirst forever un-

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slacked, forever clamoring. So he drew, with his little, awkward, narrow, concentrated strokes, drew charcoal lines upon brown paper. At intervals he cried "Zut!" rubbed out everything, and began anew. And that "Zut!" that childish oath, was big. It was a challenge to the limitations of Man, the stupidity of Matter, the perversity of Things. My muscles do not obey, my nerves fail me, my charcoal and paper are inadequate—Zut! I'll try again. Zut! for matter, the cussedness of things. Zut!—on for the Ideal! And as he worked and erased, created and destroyed and began again, a splendid fever stole through his veins, an ardent exaltation thrilled his being, and it was fine—ah, it was fine!

It had all begun with meeting the American, one day the preceding summer.

When there had come to Jacquot wondrous rumors of the presence in the village of the extraordinary foreigner from beyond the seas, with the more precise information that, at the very time, he was to be found in the meadows near the pond called "la Mare au Diable," he had set out in his clattering little sabots, all a-thrill with curiosity. And when, having cautiously climbed a haystack pointed out to him by François as screening the formidable creature, he poked his

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nose over the edge (François had meanwhile legged it from the spot in a sudden access of terror, leaving Jacquot to brave the peril alone) he was much astonished and no less disappointed to see, instead of a vermilion-skinned, beaded and feathered savage with a tomahawk in his hand and scalps on his belt, merely the rotund, sun-lit top of a huge and very pacific tan-hued parasol.

For a time sufficient to adjust himself to this new complexion of things, Jacquot lay on his stomach at the top of the stack. From beneath the parasol there came indications of life:—sundry vague movements, a little, dry cough. His curiosity fully restored, Jacquot let himself slide down the shining, golden slope, and when he rose to his feet he was beneath the parasol, with a big, broad human back not two feet from his eyes. The prospect, at first, seemed to promise a continuance of disillusion. The gentleman seated there on his folding-stool was woefully lacking in exciting traits. He was well dressed, very well dressed, almost as well as Monsieur le Préfet. A step to the right and a cocking of the head showed Jacquot that the person's skin was not at all red, but a rather fine white, the only red things about him, in fact, being a carefully trimmed pointed beard and the

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flamboyant necktie flowing beneath it. That same inquisitive movement which disclosed to Jacquot these disappointing facts, however, plunged him into an enchantment—well, from which he was never to be free again.

For standing before the gentleman was a wooden frame upon which was set a square of canvas, and on this canvas was la Mare au Diable —yes, the whole Mare au Diable with its gloom-black waters, pierced on the nearer shore with bayonet-like rushes, reflecting on the other side the eternally trembling poplars; the Mare au Diable, with its fringe of deep green meadows, its whole placid, enigmatic, brooding countenance—but colored, ah, beautifully colored, with reds and oranges and purples that were not exactly present, it must be admitted, in the real Mare au Diable glowering a hundred yards ahead, but which, to Jacquot,—who did not know that the gentleman belonged to the Impressionistic school, and that the gentleman, being young, was somewhat violent in his loyalty to the dictates of his school—were very delightful. So, unfettered by school and theory, Jacquot stood there quietly and admired, admired with his whole being, his eyes round as an owl's, his breath coming fast. Just then the painter was striving at a bit of cloud which, by a curious freak of the sun, now

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near its setting, glowed with a color that needed no heightening even to the impressionistic eye. Hurriedly he was mixing paints on his palette, trying them, then smearing them out, not succeeding in the sought effect. Finally he seemed to spring upon the right track; his attempts became nearer and nearer to reality, then suddenly he had it!—the bit of color in the sky was caught, transferred to the canvas, flamed there triumphant.

Jacquot could hold in no longer. "Bravo! bravo!" he piped, clapping his hands; "bravo! that's just it!"

"Eh?" ejaculated the red-necktied gentleman, suddenly pivoting on his seat and fixing a pair of clear blue eyes upon the urchin. "Eh? what's just it?"

"I ask your pardon," mumbled Jacquot, now much abashed; "I ask a thousand pardons, monsieur; it is very impolite to look over the gentleman's shoulder. I ask your pardon."

"Well, well," said the gentleman deprecatingly; "but what's just it?" he went on in a French that seemed to come with some effort. "What's just it?—that's what I want to know."

"I beg your pardon," repeated Jacquot, in the depths of humility at his want of savoir-faire; "I should not have looked."

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"But *what's* just it?" persisted the inquisitioner.

"The cloud, monsieur," ejaculated Jacquot, regaining his confidence as his enthusiasm sparkled anew; "ah, the cloud it is so true!"

The gentleman looked at the boy curiously. "You noticed that, eh?" he said, half to himself. He turned on his stool to the picture. "Yes, that cloud is pretty fair," he murmured. He turned again to Jacquot. "I wish you were the jury of the Salon," he said—and a string of white teeth suddenly flashed beneath his red mustache.

That smile completed Jacquot's conquest. As for the painter, he had been won already; so it was side by side that they returned to the village, through the long, wet grass, in the gloaming.

After that Jacquot carried the painter's boxes and trotted at his elbow on their excursions through the surrounding country in search of inspiring landscapes. The painter called Jacquot "caddy," which must have been an American name, for, at Jacquot's behest, it was in vain that Monsieur le Curé looked the word up in his big Larousse. And Jacquot called his tall friend Monsieur Villiame, following the authorities as again represented by Monsieur le Curé, to whom Jacquot, after unsuccessful attempts to under-

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stand the name as spoken by its owner, had taken it written upon a piece of paper.

"Umph, umph," said Monsieur le Curé, looking critically at the card over his horn spectacles; "W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s," he spelled; "umph, Vi-l-liame; yes, that's it:—Monsieur Villiame."

The same Monsieur le Curé was somewhat of an obstacle to the rambles of Jacquot at the heels of his long-legged friend. For, a year before, after the death of his wife, Père César, covertly observing his son's precocity, had decided to make a priest of him; two hours a day, Jacquot had to study reading, writing, Latin and the catechism with Monsieur le Curé. He did better in the first three studies than in the last. His mind had a disconcerting way of working in images, and abstractions slipped him like so many eels. Easily enough he possessed himself of the doctrine of "Dieu en trois personnes," but when it came to "La Transubstantiation" or "La Doctrine de la Grâce"—that was another matter. "God in three persons"—that was easy, for it could be worked in pictures. There was Dieu la Père—God the Father—a benign old man up in the clouds, with kind blue eyes, a long white beard, and clothed in beautifully draped robes, color of the sky; then there was Dieu le Fils—God the Son—with a fine, pale, sorrowful

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visage, a crown of thorns upon his head, and patient, pitying, forgiving eyes; and last was Dieu le Saint Esprit—God the Holy Ghost—a dove, a pretty, harmless dove with a vivid red heart pulsating upon its white breast. The only disconcerting thing about all this was that no provision was made for le petit Jésus, who, on Christmas nights, flies in by open windows or down chimneys and leaves gifts in the sabots of good children. True it is that Monsieur le Curé said that Dieu le Fils and le petit Jésus were one and the same; but that was puzzling, for certainly Dieu le Fils was a man with a pale, sorrowful face, while le petit Jésus—why, he was an adorable baby-body, with a fat, smiling face and, growing from his chubby shoulders, two white wings. It was as hard to understand as "la transubstantiation," and other impalpable mysteries.

Of this difficulty Jacquot unburdened himself one day to Monsieur Villiame, as, lying on his stomach in the grass, a wisp of straw in his mouth, he was watching the latter's canvas gradually come to life. At first the conversation gave little promise of enlightenment.

"What is it, le petit Gee-soo?" said Monsieur Villiame, whose French, it must be admitted, improved but very slowly.

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"You don't know le petit Jésus?" exclaimed Jacquot, pity and desolation in his voice; "you have not him in America? Oh, you poor people!"

"Well, now, tell me what it is," said Monsieur Villiame, seemingly a little nettled; "we have many things in America that you have not here, and I guess we have everything you have."

"Well," started Jacquot, after composing himself to make adequate the description of that fine thing the poor Americans lacked, "on the Christmas night, after the bells have tolled twelve—you know, ding-dong, ding-dong, like that twelve times—and all the country is quiet and everybody is sleeping, with le Bon Dieu looking down upon them, then le petit Jésus comes in by the windows and the chimneys, and in the sabots of good little boys and girls he puts—ah, beautiful things—dolls and swords, and machines that go of themselves and—and—sometimes boxes of colors, yes, like that of yours there, with paints and brushes and everything——"

"Oh!" interrupted Monsieur Villiame, suddenly enlightened; "we've got him, sure we've got him in America."

"You have him? Ah, I'm glad!" said Jacquot, much relieved.

"Yes," went on Monsieur Villiame; "certaine-

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ment we have him. We call him Santa Claus!"

"Santeeklose!" exclaimed Jacquot, somewhat disillusioned; "Santeeklose, is that what you call him? That's not very—very pretty."

And when he told the Curé of his new discovery—"Ce sont des barbares, ces Américains!"—they're barbarians, these Americans!—cried Monsieur le Curé, much scandalized at this unheard-of naming of le petit Jésus.

As the autumn days passed and the winter neared, Jacquot's concern grew less purely theological and much more personal. He was wondering whether, the coming Christmas, the little Jesus would visit him. As far back as Jacquot could remember, up to the last year, the little Jesus had remembered him, and in his treasure box in his room there were still, pale and somewhat dilapidated, remnants of those past bounties—a little, leaden Turco soldier with jauntily pointed bayonet, a red képi like that of the colonel of the garrison, and a box of compasses with which one could draw beautiful rings. But last Christmas Jacquot had found nothing in his sabots. And, with the dull pain of his mother's absence still at his heart, he had felt very much, very much abandoned indeed. So now it was with trepidation that he awaited the fateful night, all the more that this time more depended

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upon it than had ever before. For, after much silent meditation, Jacquot had at length made up his mind to see the little gift-giver personally and ask him, ah! for something very fine, something far different from tin soldiers and képis and compass-boxes, something—oh, if only he could get that!

This preoccupation seldom left Jacquot and, one day that he was with Monsieur Villiame out in the fields, a day so cold that Jacquot had to keep stamping his feet and waving his arms while Monsieur Villiame, between strokes, took short runs around his easel, Jacquot suddenly found himself saying:

"I wonder if he will come."

"Who will come?" asked Monsieur Villiame.

"The little Jesus; your Santeeklose; I wonder if he will come Christmas night."

"Why? do you want him to come very much?" Monsieur Villiame left his painting and turned to the boy, interested.

"Oh, monsieur, I want him to come very much indeed this time," sighed Jacquot.

Monsieur Villiame turned to his canvas and, with his palette knife, pasted several bits of glowing color in his sky.

"He'll come," he said suddenly, with an explosive energy that startled Jacquot.

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"You think he will come?" he stammered timidly.

"Sure, son," reiterated Monsieur Villiame; "Santa Claus will come to you Christmas night. I—I—guarantee it!"

And with this assurance Jacquot had to be satisfied for the three weeks that were yet to pass before the mysterious and sacred night.

From his fine ecstasy of labor which had made him forget the importance of the moment, the ladder awaiting at the window, the ambush laid for little Jesus, Jacquot was finally awakened by the vacillations of the light. He started up and looked at his candle, and the little flame was dying, dying with splutters of protest, with sudden little explosive efforts to live, farther apart, feebler every moment. The wax sizzled, the flame weakened, weakened till it was only a luminous thread, then with a crackling it would flare up again, struggle against the encompassing darkness for a few valiant seconds, again to dwindle, dwindle till it almost disappeared. Jacquot watched this small agony with concern, with a concern that was not only for the present; for—let this be whispered—Jacquot's method of obtaining candles was a trifle irregular, and that very evening had received a serious setback.

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Every Sunday morning, as Jacquot started to mass, Père César, who stayed at home to read the week's accumulation of *Le Petit Journal,* gave his small son a copper cent to put in the collection, and for the past six months the copper cent had gone to enrich not the church, but the candle-maker. To the Sundays every Church holiday offered a valuable supplement, and Jacquot had made the mistake of calculating upon the Christmas mass, so that Père César's announcement that they would go to church together on the morrow was a sad blow indeed.

The little candle made one last, long, desperate effort. It flamed up bright, so bright that the room was illumined with a splendor almost celestial; then, as it shone thus clear, clearer than it had ever before in its humble life, suddenly, with a rattle, a sound almost like a cry of distress, out it went, snuffed as by some gigantic shadow-hand.

For a moment, as Jacquot stood there blinking in the obscurity, a sense of solitude acute as pain overwhelmed him. Then, faint, from afar, there came to his ears a sweet, silvery jangle; nearer, farther, other silver voices answered, crossing, recrossing in the cold, clear air; and finally deep, resonant, the village church bell began to clang the announcement. Jacquot's heart leaped up into his throat; "Noël! Noël!" he

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whispered—and trembled, his eyes upon the open window through which he could see a big, humid star, glowing upon the horizon like a tear. He moved nearer, then started back in fear, for the ladder was vibrating with the weight of something, somebody coming up.

Panic seized the lad and, huddled back against the farthest wall, he watched the window with dilated eyes. From outside there came a rustling sound and the shaking of the ladder. A fixed light appeared at the opening, glowed there for a moment, red and big like a harvest moon, then dropped slowly inside to the floor, and Jacquot saw that it was a lantern. A black body then filled the window entirely, there was a rubbing of clothes, a short rip, a smothered exclamation, the body rolled to the floor, then unrolled and stood upright. A sudden mad courage possessed Jacquot. He darted forward, seized the lantern and held it up to the mysterious form. And in the dim light there stood a strange being—a tall, majestic man, with snow-white hair, a long white beard, white brows beneath which shone kind, blue eyes, and dressed in a white, fluffy coat.

"Oh," said Jacquot, half strangled with surprise; "you are not the little Jesus!"

The being did not answer. He stood there, calm, majestic, and silent.

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Jacquot moved back two steps and contemplated him long, fearfully. Then understanding flashed upon him; a sweet confidence smoothed his tense little features. He moved forward again.

"Ah," he said, placing his hand trustingly upon the sleeve of the being, "I know; you are Dieu le Père."

The being did not answer. A strange convulsion passed over his face, but was immediately lost in the shadow as, reaching forward, he gently lowered the lantern in Jacquot's hand.

"I understand," went on Jacquot; "the little Jesus, he could not come, so you came instead. That is very good of you, Monsieur Dieu le Père."

Dieu le Père nodded majestically. "Yes," he said, in a deep voice, "you are a good little boy, so I thought I would come."

"But," exclaimed Jacquot in sudden concern, "the little Jesus, he is well? He is not ill, is he? I would be so sorry if he were ill!"

"No, he goes well," said Dieu le Père; "he is very well; but he was tired to-night, and besides, I wanted to come myself."

"Ah," said Jacquot; "I am so glad he is not ill. I was ill once, two weeks, three weeks—and my head was hot, so hot! But my mother, she put

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wet rags all the time on my forehead, and I became well."

There was a moment of silence. Benign and pensive, Dieu le Père towered in the obscurity, and Jacquot felt very small. He made an effort to break the embarrassing pause.

"And every one is well, Monsieur Dieu le Père?" he asked politely. "Madame la Vierge Marie, she was well when you left?"

"Yes," answered Dieu le Père, "she was well and happy."

"She is so good," murmured Jacquot; "and Monsieur Your Son, is he still always so sorrowful?"

"He is sorrowful, but he is happy," said Dieu le Père.

Jacquot pondered over this seeming contradiction.

"Yes, I see," he said at length, gravely; "sometimes I come to my room and think of my mother who is dead, and I feel—ah, so sorrowful, and yet, it is happy, the sorrow; yes, it is happy."

"Yes, that's it," said Dieu le Père.

There was another long pause, broken this time by Dieu le Père.

"I came to-night," he said, "because I knew you wanted to ask for something. Now tell me what it is."

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For weeks and weeks Jacquot had prepared himself for this. He had decided to the minutest detail just what it was he wanted; he had worded the demand and rehearsed it and rehearsed it, till it would flow freely, almost mechanically from his lips. But now that the crisis had come, he could not. What he wanted suddenly assumed proportions gigantic, impossible. It was so much to ask, so much, so much—no, he could not do it.

So, when at length he spoke, it was to murmur: "A—a—box of colors."

Without hesitation, from within his great cloak Dieu le Père drew a flat, oblong box and gave it to the lad. Jacquot took it with reverence and an air of thankfulness a bit forced. It was a beautiful box. Tacked upon the cover was a picture, a pretty picture of a midsummer field, with ladies and gentlemen, bright-garbed, raking hay in graceful attitudes. And a peep within the box showed three symmetrical rows of small color squares, with four brushes ranged alongside, and, in a corner, a little porcelain dish to mix paints in—everything that could be wished, and all so neat, so diminutive, that it was a pleasure to the eye.

And yet, though he strove hard to hide it, a gnawing disappointment was in Jacquot's heart,

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and, as the visitor seemed preparing to leave, unconsciously his mouth opened in subtle, detaining words.

"Oh, Monsieur Dieu le Père, please do not forget to pay my respects to Madame la Vierge and Monsieur Your Son."

"No, I shall not forget," said Dieu le Père, and he took a step toward the window.

"Just a minute," cried Jacquot; "I have something here, yes, something you could give for me to the little Jesus. It is—it is his picture."

And, stooping, Jacquot picked up the sheet of paper upon which was charcoaled the result of the night's toil.

This time the diversion was more successful. For, looking at first idly at the drawing in the light of the lantern, Dieu le Père gave a start, glanced at the child, then back at the drawing, and for a minute was lost in close inspection.

"You drew that?" he asked at length, so sharply that Jacquot thought he was angry.

"Yes," admitted Jacquot humbly; "yes, I drew it for the little Jesus."

Dieu le Père let out a big breath. "Well, I'll—" he said, and again he gazed at the drawing. "Well, I'll be—" he repeated, but again his sentence vanished into contemplation before anything fatal had been said.

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A sudden movement caused Jacquot to think that he was going to leave.

"Oh, Monsieur Dieu le Père," he cried, feeling that he must, must detain him, "I want to ask you something."

"Ask," said Dieu le Père benignly.

But again Jacquot could not. It was too much; no, it was impossible.

"I want to ask you," he prevaricated, "about something I do. I want to know if it is very bad. I am afraid it is very wicked."

"What is it?" said Dieu le Père.

"When I go to mass," began Jacquot hesitatingly, "father gives me one cent to put in the collection, but I—I do not put it in the collection."

"No?" said Dieu le Père, with singular want of indignation. "What do you do with it?"

"I—I buy charcoal—to draw," whispered Jacquot, trembling.

A strange thing happened to Dieu le Père. He began to shake, to shake, to shake. He shook all over. He shook till his beard waved, shook till the floor, the walls of the little room vibrated. He stood straight and shook; he doubled up and shook. Jacquot was much scared.

"Oh," he said, "you are angry, very angry."

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And suddenly Dieu le Père stepped forward, bent down, and kissed the little boy on the forehead.

"Ah," said Jacquot, a great joy filling his heart, "you are not angry, are you? You like me anyhow, don't you?"

Again Dieu le Père bent down and kissed the lad; and before he was aware of it, Jacquot was pouring out the prayer so long restrained.

"Oh, Monsieur Dieu le Père, what I wanted to ask the little Jesus, what I wanted to ask you, it was not a box of colors; it was something else, something—oh, so big I was afraid. I wanted—I wanted——"

"What did you want?" encouraged Dieu le Père.

"Oh," said Jacquot, "I thought maybe you could tell Monsieur Villiame sometime, whisper in his ear, you know, to teach me, teach me—how to paint!"

"Monsieur Villiame?" asked Dieu le Père, seemingly much astonished. "Who is Monsieur Villiame?"

"He lets me carry his boxes when he goes to paint," explained Jacquot. "He is a painter, and he paints—ah, so beautifully! If you would ask him to teach me, if you would."

"He paints beautifully?" asked Dieu le Père,

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apparently most interested in that part of Jacquot's outpourings.

"Ah, que oui," sighed Jacquot, "so beautifully —it is an ecstasy!"

And before he knew it Jacquot was away up from the ground and half smothered in a combination of cloak and beard that tasted like lamb's wool.

"I will do it!" thundered Dieu le Père; "you shall learn to paint, and some day, I promise it, you'll be a big artist. Like Monsieur Villiame," he added under his breath.

Then putting the little boy gently back to the ground, Dieu le Père, as majestically as was compatible with his own bulk and the size of the aperture, withdrew through the window; the ladder trembled against the roof for a while, and Jacquot was once more alone in the cold and the dark. But in his heart there glowed something warm and inextinguishable, and all night, in his humble bed, he thrilled with little shudders of ineffable delight.

It was a few days after this that Jacquot, picking up Monsieur Villiame's paraphernalia, found them heavier and more complicated than usual. When they had arrived at their post—a nook by a flowing brook—the explanation burst upon the

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lad, for there were two easels, one Monsieur Villiame's and another much smaller, and there were two stools, one also much smaller than the other, and, in fact, of everything there was a double in miniature.

Silently they arranged the things. Then, "I'm going to teach you how to paint," said Monsieur Villiame.

"Yes?" said Jacquot. And seemed not at all astonished.

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THE FISHING OF SUZANNE

MONSIEUR LE COLONEL was away at drill. When he had left, an hour before, his neck was bulging and red, his stiff white mustache rose in exclamation points on both sides of his nose, and, hardly in the saddle, he had sunk his spurs savagely into his Anglo-Arab, which, in a few long bounds, had disappeared down the lane leading to the garrison. Since that, judging from the shrieks of bugles, the roar of the "fanfare," and the heavy treading of columns, the garrison had been engaged in relieving, through exercise, Monsieur le Colonel's excessive emotion.

Madame la Colonelle was away at her marketing. She had left soon after Monsieur le Colonel, a tan parasol upon her shoulder, with Josephine, the cook, waddling after her, a gigantic basket upon her arm. Madame la Colonelle also was agitated. Her nose was shiny, and in her left hand she held a handkerchief, pressed into a wad, which she frequently slipped beneath her veil, to her eyes.

Marie, the maid, was in the basement. She

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had gone there to make sure that the furnace was drawing well. As she was coming up again, however, a sudden lassitude had caused her to sink down upon the steps; where she still sat, still languid with that odd, half-pleasant weariness. She was looking at Cyril, Monsieur le Colonel's orderly, who was blacking Monsieur le Colonel's boots. Cyril's red trousers were turned up at the bottom, his shirt was turned up at the elbows; the vizor of his *képi* and his nose were turned up parallelly—so that he looked like a wistful interrogation point.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he was saying; "*si vous vouliez, si vous vouliez!* If you would, if you would!"

And the sigh following this exclamation condensed upon the Colonel's boots in a vapory cloud, which the vigorous brush immediately converted into black luster.

"How beautifully you polish boots, Monsieur Cyril," answered Marie. Her mouth was mocking, but her eyes were tender.

But really, we have nothing to do with this affair of Marie and Cyril—nor, in truth much to do with Monsieur le Colonel and Madame la Colonelle. All this is merely to explain how Suzanne came to be alone in the nursery.

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She was alone and, seated in a big, soft arm-chair, she was fishing out of the window.

It was a pleasant morning. A slight breeze bulged inward the white curtains, and with this breeze came the fragrance of the hawthorn hedge that lined the lane below. Between the lane and the garden was a stone wall ten feet high. On its garden side was a terrace, the plane of which was only a few feet from the top of the wall; to Suzanne the terrace was a pond.

She held in her fine little hands a broomstick; at the end of the broomstick a string was tied; at the end of the string a bent pin was hooked. The stick lay across the railing before the window; the string dropped in a slight diagonal past the obesity of the balcony of the lower story, then straight down; and the pin dangled somewhere on the surface of the terrace, out of sight because of the balcony, and two stories below the angler. At times stick, string, and pin became agitated with a convulsive movement. The little girl, greatly excited, drew them in, and jerked off the hook an invisible fish. She held it in both hands (it was always a big one), examined it carefully, and said, "This, it is a sturgeon," or, "This, it is a salmon." Then she slipped it into the pocket of her blouse.

(Which proves Suzanne to be an idealist; for

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it is manifestly impossible to slip into a pocket as little as the one over her heart, big fish after big fish, even though imaginary.)

She had on a little black frock made of light material that looked like crêpe. There was a lacy fringe of whiteness, just a peep of it, along the skirt edge; the short socks above the buckled slippers also were white, as were the sash about her waist and the ribbon holding her brown curls—but this whiteness only emphasized the oldish black. With it went a certain mild sadness of visage and gesture. This was because Suzanne was an *orpheline.* To be an orphan in France is not a fact to be evaded. It is a condition that gives one a fixed place in society and demands a conduct rigidly codified. One wears mourning; one is an object of discreet but perfectly obvious commiseration from old ladies, of secret and admiring awe from boys and girls; and naturally, in this ambient atmosphere, one takes on a paleness, airs a little languid and sad —and one is filled with a subtle sense of importance that is not unpleasant.

But the crooked little frown between Suzanne's big eyes was not because of this. No; she had a worry. Every now and then she put away pole, line, and hook in a corner, and tiptoed down the long corridor till she was opposite the closed

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door of a room. There she stood awhile, the index and middle fingers of her right hand in her mouth, listening. From behind the closed door there came to her a sound of sobbing.

This had been going on since early morning, after breakfast. At first it had been violent, causing mostly fear; but gradually it had become softer and softer, arousing great pity. It was a gentle plaint now—and each time Suzanne returned to her window, the line in her forehead was deeper, and her fishing more languid.

The room from which came this dolorous music was that of Aunt Hélène (Aunt Lili, Suzanne called her)—and it was Aunt Lili who was weeping; beautiful, joyous, charming Aunt Lili was weeping. It was strange like the end of the world.

"Why does she weep?" asked Suzanne of herself.

Of course, that queer happening of the morning was the immediate cause. At breakfast, that morning, Grandpapa le Colonel, carefully looking past Aunt Lili, had said to Grand'maman la Colonelle: "I will have no longer foreigners in my home. This is a house French, Christian, and honorable. I will have no friend of traitors place his foot in it!"

Tears immediately had come to Grand'maman

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the Colonel's eyes. And Aunt Lili had suddenly risen, very tall—so tall that Grandpapa the Colonel, still in his seat, looked collapsed and quite short.

Then, just as both their mouths were opening, their eyes had fallen on Suzanne. With one movement they had stepped into the parlor, while Grand'maman had whisked Suzanne out into the garden.

There, in spite of distance and walls, she had heard sounds: first, the deep bass of the Colonel, then—oh, miracle!—a stamping of a foot that was not the Colonel's, and a reiterated exclamation, rising in a crescendo of passion, which sounded much like "*je-l'aime-je-l'aime-je-l'aime-je-l'aime,*" like this, *ad infinitum,* and rapid as the shooting of a machine gun.

Since that:

Choleric disappearance of Monsieur le Colonel (to drill).

Limp departure of Madame la Colonelle (to the market).

Weeping of Aunt Lili (in her room).

An extraordinary state of affairs (everywhere).

Suzanne caught a big perch, slipped it into her pocket, and thought on.

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All this had begun, she felt, with the advent of Monsieur Williams (she, the Colonel, Madame la Colonelle, Cyril, Marie—every one but Aunt Lili—pronounced it Monsieur Villiame).

For certainly, at that time Aunt Lili had changed. She would get very joyous suddenly, and romp like a boy; then tears would come into her eyes, and picking you up, she would hug you till it hurt.

And then, she had bought an Ollendorf book; she'd walk with it in the garden, and say to the blushing roses, or the pale lilies, or the rustling elms, "How do you do?" and "Good-morning," and "The shoes of the blacksmith's son are too large for the feet of the baker's granddaughter."

And last Fourteenth of July she had hung out of her window not only the French tri-color, but another flag, with red and white stripes and many stars in one corner. Grandpapa the Colonel had not liked that.

He also had changed. He was always grumpy in the morning now. And several times Suzanne had overheard the following conversation:

"At the end of it all, what does he want, this sort of a savage of *le Far West?*"

"Who, my friend: do you mean Monsieur Vil-

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liame?" counter-questioned Madame the Colonel suavely.

"Of course. What does he mean, visiting us every night—and staying and staying and staying—as if he did not know I must be up at six—and acting, my faith, as though he wished you and I were not there at all!"

"It is the custom of his land, maybe. And—maybe he—wants not us."

"Why comes he at all, then?"

Madame the Colonel hesitated. Then, with infinite caution, "Sometimes, *mon ami,* I think—he would—see Hélène—alone," she hazarded.

A terrific snort from Monsieur the Colonel: "*Il ne manquerait que cela, alors!!!*"

"*Il ne manquerait que cela,*" literally translated, means, "There would lack nothing but that, then!" But really, it signifies, "We are coming to the end of the universe!" (only, that's too weak); or, "Of all the absurdly impossible and preposterous ideas!" (only, that's not quite it, either); or, "May I be eternally parboiled in the caldrons of the ten million devils if ever I heard of such knock-me-down impudence!" (only, that's not strong enough). In short, it means the abomination of desolation in the only language that knows how to express it.

This is all that Suzanne knew.

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What Suzanne did not know was:

That there was a Dreyfus affair.

That when you are a colonel in the French army, and your name is Jacques Puvis de la Bourdonnerie, and you are a Christian (which means a Catholic) and a patriot (that is, a Frenchman), you abhor all these socialists, anarchists, atheists who are seeking to demolish the holy institutions of France (or what is left of them) by destroying their bulwark, the army, through the simple process of siding in with a traitor and setting him free.

That it is supremely annoying, at such a crisis, to find in the daily papers telegrams tending to show that all the foreign enemies of France have the impudence and bad taste openly to announce their designs by declaring themselves emphatically in favor of such socialists, anarchists, atheists, and traitors.

That of all these foreigners the Americans, who get up monstrous petitions calmly asking their President to step across the Atlantic for a few minutes and settle for France its question of Honor (which is none of their business), are the most exasperating.

That at such a time it is the limit to have one of those savages (a dauber of paints, to boot, who wears a red necktie) come to your hearth even-

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ing after evening, and ignore you and your wife, and spend hours staring like a cow at your sweet and dutiful daughter.

That the limit is passed when that insolent young barbarian asks for the hand of said daughter, calmly, in the most casual way, as though it were the most natural thing in the world (instead of the most monstrous), and in a tone that suggests that it doesn't matter the least in the world, anyway, *what* your answer is going to be.

That the situation becomes absolutely intolerable when that young Iroquois, upon being firmly told that Mademoiselle Hélène belongs to a family French, Christian, and honorable, and will marry only a gentleman from another family French, Christian, and honorable, makes light of this categorical refusal, couched, as it should plainly appear to any man of taste and breeding, in terms containing an undercurrent of discreet reproach—and leaves the house smilingly declaring that he loves Mademoiselle Hélène and *will* have her——

So that there is none left to take to task excepting said Mademoiselle Hélène——

Who forthwith is transformed from a sweetly brooding, gracious, and submissive young woman to a virago who stamps her foot and says, "*je-*

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l'aime-je-l'aime-je-l'aime-je-l'aime" with the rapidity and the strength of a machine gun.

"Too-*too*-toot-tootoo*too*tootootoo*toot*-too; too-*too*-toot-too-too-*too*-too-too-too-toot," went the bugles in the distance.

Then, "poompoompoompoo-oo-oom, poom-poompoo-oom, *poo-oom*poompoom, poom-*poo-oom,* poom-poom; poompoompoompoo-oo-oom, poompoompoom, *poo-oo-oom*poom-poom, poom-poompoom*poomp,*" went the big basses, the trombones, the barytones, the cornets, drums, and cymbals. Oh, the garrison was having a beautiful drill. That is what goes with an indignant colonel!

"Ah, mademoiselle," Cyril was saying, rubbing his fifth pair of boots (boots were the one luxury the Colonel freely allowed himself); "ah, mademoiselle! If only you would listen to me a bit. My service expires in two months; Monsieur le Colonel says he will take me as valet—and you are here—and it is a good place—and—and——"

"*Regardez,* here is a spot there," said Marie, pointing to an infinitesimal speck in the lacquer-like blackness of boot No. 10.

Suzanne, above, caught a pike.

She was deftly taking it off the hook when suddenly she saw, framed in the hawthorn of the

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hedge across the lane, a man who was watching her.

To be watched by a man, if one is a future American miss, is not so terrible; when one is a French demoiselle in the bud, it is, to say the least, very disconcerting. Suzanne gave a start, her hands opened, and the imaginary pike flopped to the floor, where straightway it became convulsed with imaginary convulsions.

A second glance, however, stolen at the man in the hedge, reassured Suzanne. He seemed a nice man. He was young, for one thing, and had no ugly, bristly beard. He wore a big straw hat with the brim turned back in front; his necktie was tied like her hair ribbon—and it was red!

This red necktie captivated her. She looked at him now frankly. His eyes, even at that distance, shone friendly. Suddenly his mouth opened in a smile. She smiled too—she could not help it. Then his right hand rose to his mouth and threw her a kiss.

A big weight seemed to fly from her. The impalpable air of mourning that gently stifled her lifted. There was no pity, no commiseration, in *his* ways. Right away he had assumed the joyous manner. Her little hand rose to her mouth and, bird-like, fluttered toward him in a kiss.

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He seemed hugely delighted. His head reared back, and a double row of teeth (very white teeth) flashed in the sun. Then *both* his hands went to his lips, threw another kiss—and he was gone!

Suzanne was again alone—and like an airy pall, a mournfulness again descended about her. She fished on—but without interest.

This solitude, however, did not last long. After a time he reappeared, the funny man. He carried a long pole, taken, Suzanne surmised, from the Granjean hop-field nearby, and he was smoothing one end of it with his knife. When he had it quite smooth, he began, for her benefit evidently, an extraordinary gesticulating, like the pantomime, at the circus, of the clown announcing the trick he means to attempt. Then, seizing the pole a little above the middle with his left hand, and higher up with his right, the point thus dropping toward the ground, he began to run across the lane and toward the wall at full speed!

What was he doing! Suzanne's eyes almost leaped out of her head. Surely he would smash his head against the wall! With a sharp crunch the lower end of the pole sank into the ground; his arms, still holding the upper half, stretched taut above his head—and suddenly his body rose

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into the air! He was flying! "Oh-oh-oh," cried Suzanne with rounded mouth, both her little hands clutching her dress above her heart.

He rose and rose and rose—like a balloon; then he was motionless, hovering above the top of the wall, perched on his stick like a bird on a telegraph-pole. Smoothly, as if by tacit agreement, man and pole parted. The pole swung back the curve it had come, and clattered to the ground on the outside of the wall; the man dropped lightly on his feet upon the terrace—inside the wall.

He stopped there the merest fraction of a second, putting on the big straw hat that had flown off during the performance—fortunately, on the garden side of the wall—then, bending low, he made toward the house and disappeared beneath the balcony that protruded one story beneath Suzanne's window. She leaned out perilously far, but could not see him.

She was trembling a little with excitement at this extraordinary phenomenon—and the fishing-rod, laid across the rail, was loose in her surprise-limp hands. So it was that, when a new fish bit ferociously, the rod came near tumbling out, and it was not till she had received from it a smart rap on the chin that she mastered its evident intention to make a get-away.

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Finally, though, she had it firmly in hand. But it was behaving scandalously; surely it was a whole whale that she had hooked this time. She drew in. A cry came to her lips. On the hook was a fish; not an imaginary fish, but a real fish, made of folded paper!

"*Zut!*" said Suzanne gently, regarding her prize; "*ça, c'est trop fort!*"

It was. It was altogether too "strong" for a little girl to keep all to herself. She unhooked the mysterious fish and trotted with it to Aunt Lili's room. She listened at the closed door. There was no sound of weeping. This was reassuring. Came a rustling of paper. Could Aunt Lili be reading? Very much encouraged, Suzanne tapped gently. No answer. Another tap. "What is it?" asked a melancholy voice. "It's me," said Suzanne. "What is it, Suzanne; what is the matter, little girl?"

"I have a fish for you, Auntie."

"Auntie is very tired. Be a good little girl and play on."

"But, Auntie, I have a fish, a real fish made of paper."

"Then put it in the bath-tub and let it swim."

"But, Auntie, it is a real one, of paper; it can't swim."

A silence, then the door opened, and Auntie

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peered out with a dolorous face. "*What* is it, *chérie?*"

"Here is the fish. I caught it for you. Out of the window."

Aunt Lili took the fish, gave it an absent glance, started, and with fingers that trembled, tore it open (it was a fish that opened into a flat sheet of paper). She threw the light of her two glowing, devouring eyes upon it, then, swooping down till her face was at the height of Suzanne's, she took her in her arms. "Where did you get that?" she asked vehemently, almost fiercely; "where—when—how—did you find it?"

"I fished it," answered Suzanne comprehensively.

"But where did you get that note—that paper, *chérie?*" Her voice now was imploring.

"I fished it—in my room—through the window."

"Oh-oh," said Aunt Lili—and she stood up, both hands holding her heart. "Let me see," she said.

Suzanne led her to the window. Aunt Lili put her head out, then leaned far out, much farther than Suzanne could do—and suddenly drew back. And again both her hands clutched at her heart —and she stood there, swaying a little, and very pale.

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"I must not," she whispered to herself. "*Non-non-non-non-non-non,* I must not"—and with a flurry of skirts she had disappeared down the corridor. There was the sound of a door being closed. The click of a key being turned in the lock—and Suzanne was again alone.

"*Décidément,*" she said, a little angry, "*dé-ci-dé-ment—*" But words painting the conduct of people that morning were not in her vocabulary. She shrugged her angular little shoulders philosophically, and returned to her fishing.

"Ra-ta-ta-ta-tat; ra-ta-ta-ta-tat," went the pole, dancing on the sill; "ra-ta-ta-ta-tat."

She drew in hastily. Another fish—again real, of paper.

She ran with it to Aunt Lili's door. "Aunt Lili," she cried; "here's another fish."

There was no answer.

"Another fish, Aunt Lili."

Again silence.

"Aunt Lili, it is great big. Come look at it."

Again silence. Then, hesitatingly: "Slip it—under—the door, Suzanne." Somehow Aunt Lili's voice seemed to be blushing (a voice *can* blush).

Suzanne slipped the fish across the sill and waited. After a moment there was a sly rustling of paper. Aunt Lili had taken the fish. Suzanne

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went back to the window—for another one. It came, almost immediately.

"Aunt Lili, here is another one."

"Slip it under the door, Suzanne."

Again a sly rustling announced Aunt Lili's fall to the temptation of paper fish.

They bit fast after that. In as many minutes Suzanne had passed five under the door. As she was returning for a sixth, however, the door opened and Aunt Lili called her. She was sitting at her dainty desk, and she was writing. She would write a sheet of paper, read it—then tear it up; write another, read it—and tear that up. Finally she had one that she did not tear. She folded it in a neat square. "Suzanne," she said sweetly, "put this on your hook. It is—it is—the bait."

Suzanne trotted off. But she had gone only a few steps when Aunt Lili cried: "No-no-no, Suzanne, you must not; come back!"

Suzanne went back. Aunt Lili took the note and read it. Then, "Yes-yes-yes," she said breathlessly; "put it on the hook; put it on!"

What a queer Aunt Lili she was getting to be, and what a queer complexion she had—all white one moment, all red the next!

Suzanne baited her hook, cast it out beyond the

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balcony, and let it slip to the terrace. Almost immediately there was a sly twitching, as if some wily old campaigner of a trout had nosed off the bait without touching the hook. This was all for quite a while. Then a furious tugging caused her to haul up hurriedly. On the hook was a piece of paper, but not at all shaped like a fish. A sense of some one's disloyalty pinched the little girl's heart. When one laboriously builds up a bubble, it is mean for another to blow it into naught. She did not know that, but obscurely she felt it. It was a disappointed Suzanne that delivered the new catch to Aunt Lili. But Aunt Lili was not disappointed. She pounced upon that piece of paper as though she were hungry, jerked it open, devoured it (with her eyes), and straightway sat down at her desk. This time she tore only three sheets in evolving a satisfactory "bait."

The game grew more and more exciting after that. Down Suzanne would drop a note, up she'd whisk another; down would go Aunt Lili's bait, up would come a docile fish. And each time Aunt Lili was nearer to receive it. Finally she was in the nursery altogether, pad and pencil in hand—and the game ceased to be one for Suzanne. Suzanne stood in a corner, big-eyed—and forgotten; while Aunt Lili baited and fished. It was

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scratch-scratch-scratch, drop the line, up with the hook, read, scratch-scratch-scratch. And what an Aunt Lili! Pale as a lily—red as a rose—gurgling with laughter—wiping her eyes—clapping her hands—clutching her heart—trembling—*what* an Aunt Lili!

At last there came a note that must have been of tremendous import. Aunt Lili read it, then dropped seated to the floor, as if faint. A great blush passed over her face and neck. She reread the note, sprang to her feet, ran to the window, leaned far out, withdrew, walked up and down the room, sat down again on the floor, was motionless a long moment, got up, walked to and fro along the corridor—and her eyebrows were getting closer together all the time, and her mouth tighter. At last, sitting down upon the floor with great determination, she wrote a word upon the pad.

It was a very little word. It looked like *"Oui."*

She folded up that little word, shut her eyes—and threw it out of the window.

The effect was singular—and almost instantaneous. From beneath the balcony the red-necktied man (maybe he had been hiding there all the time, eh?) shot out as if helped by a catapult. He streaked across the terrace; with

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one bound he was on the top of the wall—with another spring he had dropped ten feet into the lane—in two steps he had crossed the lane—and then he was in the hedge, his shoulders and head rising out of the flowery hawthorn like those bodiless angels you see in pictures, emerging from a rose (only, though a good-looking young man, a very good-looking young man, he was not angelic in appearance). He remained there a moment, waving his arms, throwing kisses, like a circus-rider who has accomplished his trick—then, as if suddenly remembering an important errand, he turned and was gone.

At the same time Aunt Lili pivoted upon her high little heels and whirred off down the corridor to her room. "Marie, Marie, Marie," she called, whisking open her trunk and emptying into it the contents of a whole drawer. "Marie, Marie, Marie—help me pack," she said breathlessly, as Marie came running in, the stupefied face of Cyril appearing at the door in the background.

(*Both* Marie and Cyril were dazed, it must be said, for the sake of precision—dazed as if suddenly they had been awakened out of a beautiful dream.)

Marie and Cyril packed, while with trembling hands Aunt Lili put on her cloak and turban.

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She ran down the steps to the porch—and a few minutes later Marie and Cyril followed, dragging the trunk. By some miracle a cab—*the* antediluvian town cab—was standing before the gate. "Put the trunk on," said Aunt Lili, panting.

Cyril put the trunk on. Aunt Lili stooped, picked up Suzanne with a tense little hug, kissed her, put her down again—and stepped into the cab, which forthwith rumbled off down the street toward the station. As it crossed the lane, a man sprang out from behind the hedge, pulled the door open, and dived in (head first, it looked). The door slammed shut, and the cab, at the best trot of its old gentleman of a horse, rattled on over the cobbles.

Marie and Cyril, still on the porch, turned upon each other eyes like soup-plates.

"She is gone!" said Cyril finally.

"Gone!" echoed Marie.

"With the monsieur that makes fishes!" completed Suzanne shrewdly.

"With the monsieur that makes fishes?" ejaculated Marie and Cyril in astounded chorus.

"With the monsieur that makes fishes," repeated Suzanne firmly.

"My faith, the whole world is mad this morning," said Marie.

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"Excepting us two," suggested Cyril, nudging her softly.

"Excepting us two," agreed Marie.

This time it was Suzanne's turn to wonder.

From the direction of the station came the toot-toot-toot of an approaching train. There was a screech of brakes, a silence, then the bang-bang-bang of compartment doors slammed by the station-master, the tr-i-i-illl of his silver whistle, an answering toot-toot, a grinding of chains, a choo-choo-ing, and then a rumble that first increased, then gradually diminished, till it sank off into a hum, far-off, over there toward Paris.

At twelve o'clock sharp, Madame the Colonel returned to the house, Josephine following majestically behind, the full basket upon her arm.

At twelve o'clock sharp, Monsieur the Colonel, on his Anglo-Arab white with froth, returned to the house.

They met at the gate and went up the steps together. Madame the Colonel had found consolation in the absorbing strategy of market-bargaining. Monsieur the Colonel had blown off much of his irritation in hard work (i.e., the work of his little infantrymen) and felt much better.

Marie, strangely enough, was nowhere to be

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seen. As soon as she had taken off her cloak and hat, Madame the Colonel went upstairs with a muttered pretext. She had not been there long when her voice, full of alarm, brought Monsieur the Colonel up after her.

He found her in Aunt Lili's room. At first he had visions of assassinations, of burglary at least. The drawers were all pulled out and empty, the closet doors wide open, a heap of miscellaneous clothing lay in the center of the floor, the desk was upset.

But Madame the Colonel passed him a note that she had just read.

He glanced at it, uncomprehending.

"She is gone," said Madame the Colonel dazedly.

"Gone—who is gone?"

"Hélène!"

"Hélène?— Gone? Where?"

"With him."

"Him?"

"Yes, him—with that Monsieur Villiame!"

Then the poor Colonel sank very suddenly into the armchair behind him. He trembled as with palsy, his face was violet, and across from him, limp in another chair, Madame the Colonel, her face hidden in her handkerchief, held with both her hands, was weeping like a fountain. About

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their feet, agitated by the breeze coming in through the open windows, eddied bits of paper —the torn fragments of Suzanne's fishes. They rustled dryly like the dead leaves of autumn.

This is about all there is to tell of Suzanne's fishing (and Suzanne's fishing is the subject of this narrative).

For many days she hung her pole out of the window of mornings, but really without conviction. And not the slightest nibblet of a nibble rewarded her.

It was a dull occupation. At her back she could feel the house, resonant with emptiness. Marie spent nearly all her time in the basement now. There was no sound of weeping from Aunt Lili's room, no sound of any kind, in fact, and when you peeped in, you were scared: it was so carefully ordered now, this room, every chair in its place, the counterpane drawn over the bed without a wrinkle, the carpets pulled skin-tight, the blinds closed—it was arranged with a beautiful and unnatural precision.

Even when Monsieur the Colonel and Madame the Colonel were in, the house seemed empty. It certainly was silent—except for discreet sniffings. The very walls, at times, seemed to have caught this trick of sniffling.

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Sometimes, in the evening, Suzanne tiptoed down the stairs in her nightgown (she had reached the age when it becomes impossible, no matter what your elders may think of it, to go to sleep at seven o'clock). Peering into the dining-room, she saw her grandfather and her grandmother sitting at the hearth, which had no fire. They sat there without speaking, Grandpapa the Colonel slightly collapsed in his armchair, a pipe that was not lit between his teeth. Grand'maman the Colonel embroidered; once in a while she would get up, and going to the other side of the table, with her back to the Colonel, she would put a handkerchief to her eyes.

Every morning the same scene would occur: As Monsieur the Colonel, having mounted his horse, saluted Madame the Colonel, standing there on the porch, she would say timidly, "My friend, if we telegraphed!"

To which Monsieur the Colonel (his neck was getting redder every day) would answer angrily, "Never of this life!"

One morning, though, Suzanne found herself saying (it had popped out of her little mouth before she knew it): "Grandfather Colonel, if we telegraphed!"

"You see, madame," said Monsieur the Colonel, turning to his wife coldly; "you see how, with

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your *obstination,* you train even this little child to be disrespectful to me."

"Oh, Puvis!" said Madame the Colonel reproachfully. But he had ridden off.

A moment later, however, he came galloping back. "Telegraph!" he thundered in a terrific voice; "telegraph, woman, telegraph away—I wash my hands of the whole affair!" And, pivoting, he was off again.

That evening for the first time, but not the last, Suzanne was allowed to eat dinner at the table of her elders. She sat on one side, and opposite her, side by side, sat Monsieur and Madame the Colonels. She was carefully steering a big spoon full of soup toward her small mouth, when suddenly spoon and soup clattered back into the plate. Her mouth stayed open.

Guess what had happened?

No, it's no use—you couldn't guess that in a thousand million years. The door had opened behind Monsieur and Madame the Colonels and —who had come in?

Aunt Lili and the monsieur who made fishes.

Aunt Lili—and how beautiful she was! Much more beautiful than ever—shining like the moon. And Monsieur Villiame, very nice too, in a neat blue suit, with a pretty gray tie, not tied like a hair ribbon, and a little red rosette in his button-

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hole. Aunt Lili stepped behind Monsieur the Colonel, Monsieur Villiame stepped behind Madame the Colonel (and he winked at Suzanne); they looked at each other, and, timing themselves, they each dropped their hands lightly over the eyes of the one before them.

"*Qui est là?*" chirped Aunt Lili.

"Kee hay law?" asked Monsieur Villiame (he looked rather foolish).

But there was no guessing. Monsieur and Madame the Colonels sprang up together, pivoted —and there followed a general *embrassade.* That is, to be precise, Madame the Colonel kissed Aunt Lili, then kissed Monsieur Villiame, then kissed Suzanne, then kissed Monsieur the Colonel, then began all over again; and Monsieur Villiame kissed Madame the Colonel, then Suzanne, then Aunt Lili; and Aunt Lili kissed Monsieur the Colonel, then Madame the Colonel, then Suzanne, then Monsieur Villiame, then began all over again; and Monsieur the Colonel kissed Aunt Lili, then Madame the Colonel, then Suzanne. And behind the door Cyril kissed *some one,* and Marie kissed some one. But Monsieur the Colonel did not kiss Monsieur Villiame. And Monsieur Villiame did not kiss Monsieur the Colonel.

That is about all. Except that, later, as

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Suzanne sat on the lap of Monsieur Villiame, she said, "What is that red ribbon there at your buttonhole?"

Monsieur the Colonel pricked up his ears. He also was very much "intrigued" by that red ribbon.

"That, little girl," answered Monsieur Villiame, pretending to be much confused about it, "is the ribbon of the Legion of Honor."

"Oh-oh—what for?"

"For my painting. It is about Lafayette and Washington. They are on a hill, looking at a lot of Englishmen they are going to capture."

"Ah!" said Suzanne.

After a while Monsieur the Colonel got up, walked around the room, and finally stood near Monsieur Villiame. "*C'est entendu,*" he said, giving him a little tap on the shoulder. "Understood, that—*c'est bien.*"

"Understood, what?" said Monsieur Villiame maliciously.

"That, about Washington and Lafayette. Let us have a little glass—to the two republics."

Which was extraordinary, because, at bottom, Monsieur the Colonel does not believe in republics—not in his own, at least.

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THE MARVELOUS NIGHT

THE house had a pinched, aristocratic air; it leaned back, as though holding its nose against the odors which in its youth doubtless had arisen from the dark, narrow street. The street now, though, was smooth and clean; it had been so for many years; and to-night its noisy and colored vivacity had given way to the calm beauty of falling snow.

Elizabeth and Maryan were in their room; already they had on their long, cool night-dresses; side by side, hands behind their backs, their small stomachs prominent, they were following with big blue eyes the movements of Father and Mother. These fond and not quite grown-up parents were examining the big fireplace—examining it with an interest beyond even that which they had shown when visiting, to rent, this odd house in a queer quarter of old Paris.

"'Tis pure Renaissance," said Father, passing his hand over the undulant marble.

"And in need of repair, as everything else," said Mother. "I'm glad I've had the furnace put in." She held her slim, white hands over

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the grating, from which breathed a gentle warmth.

"You are, my dear, the finished product of a New York flat," said Father.

"And you a colored picture out of an old story-book."

Having thus insulted each other, they looked at each other and smiled. Father stepped within the big fireplace.

"It's snowing!" he announced, triumphant as a boy.

But when he came out to prove it, everybody laughed. For the snow upon his face, having passed through soot, was black.

He was excited, and his eyes were bright. "Just step in there, Maud," he cried. "It's the bulliest old place. You can see the clouds drive by, and at times a bit of moon, and you feel the snow falling!"

"Thank you," said Mother. "I don't like black snow upon my nose."

"You're an unregenerate Harlemite!"

Father vanished again within the chimney. When he reappeared, he had a staid expression of one who had returned to a contemplation of serious affairs, and it was Elizabeth and Maryan that he addressed. Their four blue eyes were steady upon him, just about at the height of

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his waist-line. "Well, this is the place all right," he announced. "You can hang your stockings right here. For surely it is down this chimney he will come."

But the jumping and hand-clapping which he expected failed to follow his words. Instead, four big blue eyes remained upon him, solemn and immobile. A slight hesitation, like the shadow of a cloud, passed through them. "'Tain't 'thockings," lisped Maryan. "It's shoes!"

"Of course, Father," said Elizabeth. "You always think yourself in the United States still! In France, it's shoes."

"Yes, Mr. Sharon," chimed Mother, glad to regain the advantage. "In France, we don't hang stockings before the fireplace. In France, we place our *shoes* before the hearth on Christmas eve."

"Oh, very well!" said Father cheerfully. "Shoes it is! They don't hold as much as stockings, anyway. But I should advise you to put them right here before this fireplace. It is surely down this chimney that Santa Claus will come."

But the four big eyes remained just where they were, and across their azure there fled again a slight haze of doubt. "But 'tain't Santa Claus!" exclaimed Maryan, taking a deep breath.

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"No, Father. You see, you know very little about such things," said Elizabeth indulgently. "Elise told us. In France, it's the little Jesus comes down and puts toys."

"The little Jesus!"

"Yes, Mr. Sharon," said Mother, taking a smiling part in Father's discomfiting. "In France, it is not Santa Claus at all; it is the *petit Jésus,* the infant Christ himself, who comes down the chimney Christmas night——"

"To fill the stockings?"

"To fill the *shoes,* Mr. Sharon."

"Oh, very well, very well!" said Father, still cheerful. But he put his hands to his head, being all mixed up over those international complications.

"We saw him onceth," said Maryan dreamily.

"You saw him!" cried Mother.

"Yes," said Elizabeth. "Don't you remember? You took us."

"Oh—his picture—at the Louvre!"

"With his mamma. He was all smooth and naked. And he had brown eyes, but golden hair."

"Yeth," said Maryan. "His hairs was gold."

Father pounced upon Maryan, whisked her up aloft, and with one mighty heave threw her through the air, clear across the room, to the

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eider-down comforter upon the bed. Instantly, he seized Elizabeth and sent her sprawling after. They lit in a tangle of giggles and legs. "Time to go to bed!" he roared in a terrible voice.

"Oh, Frank," said Mother. And going to the bed, she laid the children in it right. "Now you must go to sleep, quick, quick, so the *petit Jésus* won't get scared, and turn back, and forget you."

"Good-night," said Elizabeth, pushing her lips out for a kiss.

"Good-night," said Maryan, reaching upward with pink arms.

"Good-night," said Mother, kissing.

"Good-night," said Father, kissing.

The light went out; the door closed softly.

In the hall, Father and Mother stopped a moment, groping for each other in the darkness. Mother put both her hands on his shoulders, and her brow against his chest. "Oh, Frank," she whispered, "if Harold were only still here—poor little Harold!"

Father placed one arm about her; his other hand went down into a pocket for a handkerchief, for he suddenly realized that he had a cold in the head.

"He would be ten years old now, Frank. Ten!"

"He's an angel, I guess," said Father.

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They pressed up close and, side by side, went on down the corridor.

The night, in the children's room, was silent for perhaps five minutes—five minutes that seemed much longer than five minutes. Then there came a strange, small sound. It was like the vibration of an electric bell; but less precise, less metallic and more gentle; like the faint, hesitant burr of a new-born electric bell, muffled beneath eider-down quilts.

Almost immediately, there rose another. Another ringing, also muffled, hesitant and soft; but with a lower note, more mellow and more grave.

"*T-t-r-r-r-ee-hee-hee-hee,*" went the first little bell.

"*Th-th-r-r-roo-hoo-hoo-hoo,*" went the second more mellow little bell.

"*Tree-hee, throo-hoo; tree-hee-hee, throo-hoo-hoo,*" they now went, both together.

Then the second little bell became a little human voice. "They think we are asleep!" it said, still under the blankets.

"They fink we's athleep!" said the first little bell, also still under the blankets.

"*Tr-r-ee-hee-hee-hee, thr-r-oo-hoo-hoo-hoo.*" This time the sound was clear. The blankets had been thrown off.

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But if the blankets were off, the night remained. "It's *awful* dark," said one of the voices.

"I got the candle all ready," said the other. "It's in the lowest drawer, under the towels, where we can find it."

"Then light it."

"It *is awful* dark, isn't it?"

"Light it!" repeated the littlest voice; and there was a movement, as of some impatient elbow nudging a sensitive rib.

A body slid down the side of the bed, bare feet thumped to the floor; there was a fumbling within the dresser, the crackle of a match. Upon the night-table a light glowed, lighting Elizabeth's head, throwing gold upon gold.

"Now come back to bed, quick!" called Maryan. She never liked to be left alone in bed.

Elizabeth leaped back, knelt, facing her pillow, and raised it till it stood up straight against the back of the bed. Then, with an adroit movement, without letting it fall down, she turned and sat up against it.

Maryan tried to imitate her sister. But her knees not being sharp like Elizabeth's but round, she slipped and went head-first into the pillow, while the lower part of her rose in the attitude of a tumble-bug. With help, though, she righted

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herself and, panting, achieved Elizabeth's position. The little girls now sat upright in bed, side by side. The expression on their faces was that of a kitten which had just lapped cream. They looked at each other, and sniggled. Then their eyes turned to the big fireplace and remained there. Maryan's left hand slid along the counterpane; Elizabeth's right slid toward it; they met and clasped.

"Do you think he'll come?" asked Maryan, after a while.

"Of course. Isn't it Christmas, and aren't the shoes all ready?"

"Will he be pretty and soft, like in the picture?"

"Of course."

"But how will he come?"

"Down the chimney."

"But how down the chimney?"

"Down the chimney; how do you suppose?"

"In a sleigh?"

"No-o; that's old Santa Claus does that."

"Then how?"

"Oh, he'll come all right!"

Silence. They stared solemnly at the fireplace. But Maryan was not good at waiting.

"Will his mamma be with him?"

"No, goosie."

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"Why?"

"Well, he has to have his breakfast when he gets back, doesn't he? Who'd have his breakfast ready, if his mamma wasn't there?"

"Then she stays home?"

"Yes."

"In heaven?"

"Of course."

"But, 'Lisbeth, how does he come?"

"Oh, Maryan, I told you already!"

"Will he fly down?"

"Maybe."

"He's got little wings, hasn't he?"

"No, goosie. That's Cupid. And the little angels what's got only heads."

"Then how?"

"Oh, Maryan, you make me nervous!"

"But how will he come *down?*"

"Oh, he's got an aeroplane. A little toy aeroplane what buzzes."

"Ain't that cute!"

"Yes, but you mustn't talk any more. Else he won't come at all, at all."

"I'll keep still."

They were silent, looking steadily at the fireplace. Before them, on the white counterpane, their hands lay clasped; above, their yellow curls mingled.

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A strange thing began to happen. The fireplace began to go away. It would go away, then suddenly come back; go away and come back, go away and come back. Finally, it went away, without coming back.

The big blue eyes saw nothing now. And seeing nothing, very sensibly, they closed.

Between the golden heads, a crack slowly appeared. It grew. One small head was sliding to the left, the other small head was slipping to the right. The separation quickened; there was a sudden divergent rush, and two white-robed little bodies sprawled across the bed, like two dolls who had fought to a mutual knock-out.

The candle spluttered. Its small flame went up and down, as though it were winking.

It was thus that Father and Mother found the room an hour later. Father entered first. He said: "The little devils! Look! The lit-tle dev-vils!"

"Did you ever!" said Mother. "Did you ever!"

"A candle," growled Father, pointing to the taper, which had quickly assumed at their entrance an expression of having seen nothing.

"*That's* Miss Elizabeth!" said Mother.

Father took Maryan by the leg, and drew her

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down to her right place in bed. With Elizabeth, who was not so chubby, and hence slept less soundly, more precaution had to be taken; but at last they were both sleeping in position, the covers up to their chins.

"What now?" asked Father.

"Put out the light; it will be safer."

The candle was blown out, and also the lamp. Then, in the dark, Father and Mother worked mysteriously. They went out and came in; they fumbled about the hearth. Their steps were a-tiptoe; their words were murmurs. But, in the obscurity and the silence, several times there were odd disturbances. A *ba-a-a* of baby sheep; a queer, flat voice saying, "pa-pa, ma-ma"; an abrupt whir as of a clock running down, and a sweet jangle of little bells. At each accident, Father and Mother were petrified for several moments into complete immobility.

Finally, the door was closed, and they were again alone in the desert hallway. And again, as if feeling lonely there, Mother threw herself upon Father's sturdy frame. "Oh, Frank," she said, "if little Harold were only here!"

"Yes, dear, yes, dear," said Father, petting her.

"He'd be ten years old now. Ten!"

"He's an angel," said Father.

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And holding each other close, they went on down the hall. A light flared, a door shut; a silence that seemed definite flowed slowly through the house.

Above, upon the roof, the snow was coming down steadily in large, humid flakes; here and there it melted, leaving small spots that glistened vaguely. The clouds were very low; they seemed almost within the reach of an upraised hand. They passed swiftly, sulphur-hued, and, tearing at times, gave a rapid glimpse of a hurrying moon, tenuous as a volute of green vapor.

To the right and the left, other roofs stretched, covered with white; spots of melted snow looked like pools. And myriads of chimneys, some high, some low, some round, some square, made about these pools a fantastic and gesticulating forest of small, mad, twigless trees.

Along this artificial sierra, through the stiff and stunted landscape, two human forms came gliding from the south. They slid, they crawled, they leaped, they made sudden shadowy rushes; they sprang across chasms like flying squirrels, and lit on all-fours as on padded paws, their bodies tight as rubber-balls.

The leader was a man. The vizor of his cap was pulled down even with his brow; rope san-

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dals were on his feet; and within his closely buttoned jacket, his squat body had a feline and disquieting resiliency. A red handkerchief, knotted about his neck, made him sinister. His movements were precise and unerring, and his eyes were sharp and quick as a ferret's.

The second was a small boy, thin as a gutter-cat. He followed the man closely, leaping as he leaped, crawling as he crawled, placing his right hand here, his left knee there, imitating each gesture with a fidelity that gave him the appearance of one of those touching little monkeys one sees at a circus, secretly tied to their crafty trainer by an invisible and inexorable chain. Twice, though, he stopped suddenly and clung convulsively with elbows, feet and nails, while his eyes, going wild, plunged along the precipitous slope beneath him. The first time, a sharp ejaculation of his leader sufficed to start him on again; the second time, the leader's hand came down upon his shoulder with a heavy, pinching grip.

They were at length upon the slate roof beneath which Elizabeth and Maryan were sleeping. They made for the rectangular masonry of the big chimney and stood up against it. The man's eyes were just even with its top.

"This is the place," he said. His voice had no

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resonance. "That's the flue down which you go."

The boy shrunk small. He was a thin little boy, and the wrist of the arm he held against the chimney was red and crevassed with cold.

"Tighten your belt," said the man.

The boy had a broad belt about his waist; sewed to it was a metal ring. He tightened the belt; then his eyes went up toward the man. In the raised chin and the cower of the shoulders, there was once more the expression of the little circus monkey afraid of its trainer.

The man was unwinding from his own waist a rope. He tied one end of it to the ring in the boy's belt. An agitation, which up to this time the boy had successfully repressed, now burst out into speech. "Oh, master," he pleaded, "not to-night, not to-night!"

The man went on looping in his right hand the loose extremity of the rope.

"Please, master! This time I am afraid. All day I have been afraid. There is something wrong. Something will happen."

"You go down the near flue," said the man calmly, and as though he had not heard the boy. "That takes you into the nursery. I drew it for you at the cabaret. Nothing there. The door is to the left. It takes you into the hallway.

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You follow that to the bottom. Just before it turns to the right, there is a door to the left. That's your door. Go in. The man's clothes will be on a chair, or somewhere about. Get his wallet. Then take one look at the woman's dressing table. Light a match—just one—for that. Grab everything that shines. That's all to-night. The wallet and what's on the dressing table. You can do it all in ten minutes."

"Master, master, I've not eaten! I'm faint——"

"Work on your knees, remember. All the time on your knees. Get up just once—at the dressing table. All of the rest of the time, keep on your knees."

"Master, I'm afraid to-night! Master——"

"Remember. The man's wallet, the jewels on the dressing table. First door to the left, then down the corridor, then again the door to the left. And on your knees!"

"Master, I beseech you—not to-night, not to-night! Master, I beseech you—please——"

In the neighborhood, a big bell struck. A wave of golden sound went flowing through the night, whelming the man and the boy. The bell struck again, and the boy, as if attuned in harmony, began to tremble to the deep vibration. Once, twice, the bell rang; three times, twelve times,

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and was still, leaving a hum in the air. The boy crossed his arms against the masonry, and buried his face in them with a small, choking sob.

The man pounced upon him and gripped him hard. "Remember what I did last time you were thus," he said coldly; "remember."

All resistance crumbled in the boy. "I'm going, master," he said. The man hoisted him up; feet first, he vanished down the chimney.

The man, remaining outside, held the rope taut as it slid through his hands. At times he threw a rapid glance over the roofs. The rope, slipping, made a scratching sound upon the stone.

Suddenly, the man went backward in a half-somersault. With an agile twist, he landed upon hands and feet. But he was now on the steeper part of the roof; on hands and knees, he went sliding on, downward toward the edge. His face was contracted; his feet, his hands stamped and clawed. Finally, he stopped himself, not a foot from the edge.

He remained here a long moment, as though he had lost the courage to attempt a movement; then began slowly, cautiously, to make his way upward again. When he had reached the chimney, he clung to it like a drunken man.

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His face was livid. He took a big breath. Then his eyes fell upon his right hand. Clenched within it, he still held the rope, and the rope was broken.

A new panic seized him instantly. In two springs, he had reached the next roof, and was flitting, an acrobatic shadow, through the tangle of chimneys. He disappeared. A minute later, he was down in the street, sliding along the walls with the smooth rapidity of a rat.

Elizabeth was dreaming that she sat in a meadow dotted with daisies, when she heard a rush, as of a fall through the air, and then the shock of a catastrophic landing.

She awoke—so quickly that, awake, the sympathetic echo of the fall rang still along her nerves—and then, immediately, did not know where she was. With downward palms, she felt for the grass; there was no grass. She plucked at a flower; there were no flowers. She was in bed! But something was missing. It was the light! There had been a light, because they had been watching. Watching for what? Ah, for the little Jesus. All the time, they had been in bed. Then that noise of something coming down? It had been right here. It had been in the chimney. Oh, it had been little Jesus, maybe. He

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was right here now, then, maybe, right here in the room, in the dark! Elizabeth began to tremble with hope, with ecstasy and with awe.

But a tender body snuggled itself against hers. She placed her right arm about it. "Did you hear dat?" whispered Maryan. "Oo, did you hear dat?"

"Yes," murmured Elizabeth, her lips against a warm small ear. "Yes."

"It's hum; Oo, maybe it's hum!"

"Sh-sh! Sh-sh!"

Very tense, her eyes making a round effort in the night, Elizabeth listened hard, holding her breath. Against her side, with the movement of a puppy-dog, Maryan had snuggled her small nose. There was not a sound in the room. Maryan began to speak again, the muffled words tingling along Elizabeth's ribs. "'Lisbeth, why don't you make a light; make a light, 'Lisbeth, make a light!"

"I'm scared," Elizabeth murmured. "I'm scared of scaring something," she corrected.

"But if you make a light, we'll *see!*" hissed Maryan vehemently.

When Maryan became vehement, precautions trembled, on the point of being shattered. Without another word, Elizabeth slipped to the floor, while Maryan nestled still closer in the hollow

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resulting from the big sister's absence. Elizabeth's hands shook a bit; two matches went wrong; then a yellow light streamed through the room, and Elizabeth, turning, followed its invasion with her eyes. "Wat is it?" called Maryan, her face still buried in the pillow, "wat is it?"

But Elizabeth, her hands clutching the opening of her night-dress upon her little chest, could say only: "Oh! Oh!"

"Well, wat *is* it?" Maryan repeated impatiently, but still without opening her eyes.

"Oh, Maryan, look, look! Toys!"

Maryan rose to her knees, like a jack-in-the-box. Her hands went up to her throat, with a gesture like Elizabeth's; her eyes opened wide. "Ooh! Ooh!" she said.

"Come!" said Elizabeth, her feet already beginning to prance. "Come, come!"

She helped Maryan down, and the two children, holding hands, went marvelling toward the fireplace. Before it rose a pyramid of toys. Toys so numerous, so commingled, that the eye could not distinguish them at first. One saw only a wheel here, a diminutive arm thrust out there, an assemblage of new shiny reds and blues, of shimmerings and shapes—an uncatalogued heap of pure joy.

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"There's a doll," said Maryan, taking a step forward. "A blue dolly with buckled shoes!"

"And a dolly washstand," said Elizabeth, advancing a second step.

"A sheep, all soft and woolly!" They took another step.

"A little watering-can for make-believe flowers!" Each step marked a new discovery.

"A tautomobile!"

"A doggy what barks!"

"A baby looking-glass; ooh, a baby looking-glass!"

"A watch!"

"A——"

"A——"

They stopped short. "Oh," said Elizabeth, "there's something behind!"

"They's somefin behind!"

"It's a boy!" said Elizabeth.

"It's little Jesus," said Maryan.

They were no longer going forward. Hand in hand, they poised in an attitude of ready flight. Behind the toys—and their eyes now saw not the toys, but only what was behind—behind the toys, in the very interior of the chimney, upon the hearth-stone, a small boy lay coiled, motionless.

"It *is* little Jesus, ain't it?" gasped Maryan.

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"Must be," said Elizabeth. "Must be."

"Let's go back to bed," proposed Maryan.

"No, you goosie; let's look," said Elizabeth.

She was standing very still, looking very hard, a small frown upon her forehead. She stepped back, seized the candle; then, light in hand, looked again, her bare toes against the first toys. Maryan, a little behind, clung to her sister's night-dress, and shivered a bit.

"He's sleeping," decided Elizabeth.

"Yeth, he's thleepin'!"

"Isn't he cute!"

"Ain't he thunnin'!"

The boy coiled there on the hearth did not move. One arm was beneath his head; the other, crossed above it as if warding off a menace, hid partly a disorder of brown curls. And the sleeve of this arm, drawn back by the gesture, showed a thin wrist, red and crevassed with cold.

Across the blue wonder of Maryan's eyes there crept slowly a troubled doubt. "But, 'Lisbeth," she said heavily, "'Lisbeth, he's dressed, all dressed!"

"Umph—of course!"

"But 'Lisbeth, when we saw his pitture, he was all nice and pretty and naked!"

"Umph—'twasn't winter then, was it? Do you think he could go out this weather and his

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mamma not say: 'Here, you little Jesus, don't you dare go out that way! Just put your clothes on, all your clothes on! Do you want to catch your death-o'-cold?'"

"But his clothes is all raggedy and poor!"

"Well, they don't wear clothes much up there; so they don't have new ones, 'cause it's of no use; and when they go out, they put on any old ones will do."

"But 'Lisbeth, he's all black, all sooty and black!"

"'Course! I'd like to see you go down a chimney, missus, and not get black all over!"

"But he ain't got wings. No wings at *all!*"

"Oh, you're always getting mixed up. It's Cupid has wings; and the little angels with only heads!"

They remained there, hand in hand, gazing in silence. Maryan was not quite quelled. "Look at his wrist," she whispered, "his little wrist!"

But Elizabeth had been looking at that wrist all the time; from the first discovery, her eyes had been hypnotized by that thin naked wrist. And now, suddenly, she gave a little sob. "Oh, he *is* so snippety and small and cold and mis'able!" she sobbed.

"What shall we do; what shall we do?" whis-

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pered Maryan, big silver globules appearing in her blue eyes.

"Oh, I don't know! Oh, I don't know!"

But almost instantly, she knew, and dried her eyes with a dash of her sleeve. "I know—let's wake him up, and give him something to eat, and put him in bed to get warm!"

"Oh, yeth!" exclaimed Maryan, bringing her hands together in a soundless clap, which was like an attitude of prayer.

They moved over against the barrier of toys. "Little boy!" Elizabeth called out.

"Little boy!" called Maryan.

He did not move.

"Little boy!" called Elizabeth; "Little boy!" chimed Maryan. They called low, but tensely, rising on the tips of their pink toes. But the boy did not move.

"We'll go and shake him." said Elizabeth resolutely.

With their feet, the two children began to toss the Christmas playthings negligently to right and left, thus clearing a path. When they were near, Elizabeth started back with a cry. "Oh, he's bleeding!"

"He's bleedin'!" cried Maryan.

Across the forehead of the boy, near the temple, a gash showed red.

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"He went to climb back," panted Elizabeth, immediately getting a vision of the catastrophe; "he went to climb back, and he fell. He brought down all these pretty toys for us, and then he went to climb back to get home, and he fell. The poor little Jesus! He went and took all that trouble, and was good to us, then he fell and hurt himself!"

"He fell and hurted hisself!" said Maryan; and the mouth uttering these words was as round as her eyes. "Oh, 'Lisbeth, will he die?"

"We must do something, Maryan; quick, we must do something. Oh, Maryan, help me pull him out of there! It's all cold in that old fireplace. Take his foot—t'other foot. Now, pull, Maryan, pull!"

"I cai-ain-t," puffed little fat Maryan.

"You must, Maryan; you *must!* Come, I take this foot and you take the other. Pull now!"

This time, drawn by both legs, the boy slid along the floor, by the path through the toys. "Get pillows!" ordered Elizabeth.

Maryan went to the bed, and successively brought three pillows. Elizabeth made a mattress of them. "Now, let's roll him on it, Maryan."

With much effort, they got him upon the im-

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provised couch. Then Elizabeth squatted on her heels and took his head upon her lap. It was thus she always did with Maryan, when playing that this accommodating younger sister was ill. Now, they had a real patient, a divine patient. Maryan instantaneously became a nurse. "Get me some water, quick, and a towel," Elizabeth commanded. And Maryan trotted to the wash-stand.

The pitcher was big, and the bowl was heavy, but standing on a chair, Maryan managed to tilt some water into the vessel, which she brought to Elizabeth. Elizabeth wet the towel, and washed the patient's sooty face, gently, tenderly; but with a maternal thoroughness, pushing back from the white forehead the long, damp locks. "Isn't he just beautiful!" she exclaimed, forgetting, this duty done, the seriousness of the situation, in an excusable access of artistic enthusiasm.

Maryan was gazing at the pale, pinched face, the wan and blue-veined brow. "He don't look like the picture," she said sincerely.

"That's because his eyes are closed," said Elizabeth, fighting for her dream.

"But his mouth ain't happy."

Elizabeth's pensive eyes had also noticed the mouth of the boy. The corners of it were drawn

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slightly downward, as though, perhaps, he had been weeping. "That's the way he looks," she whispered, "in that other picture, don't you remember? Where he is a man, and is carrying a cross."

"But he is so still."

"That's because he is hurt."

"But ain't he *never* going to move?"

This precipitated Elizabeth back into a desperate worry. "Oh, Maryan, get the cologne; quick, get the cologne water!"

There was not supposed to be any cologne, because when little girls have cologne they are liable to put it on their handkerchiefs. But there was some, any way—at the bottom of the basket, where were heaped old toys, rags, ribbons and treasures. Maryan went head first into the basket, the other part of her rising correspondingly. When her head had emerged, and the other part had resumed its natural position, she held in her hand a bottle which had once held extract of vanilla, but which was now a quarter full of cologne which Mother had missed vaguely from her store.

Elizabeth took the bottle; her lips pinched firmly, she poured it out on her patient's wound. Then, she gave a little cry. The head pillowed upon her lap had stirred. It was swaying gently

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from side to side. It stopped, then slowly raised itself. Maryan drew back one step and remained thus, petrified. The eyes of the boy were open; they were gazing upon her; big, soft, brown eyes dilated with an exquisite wonder. They held her there immobile, with her long white gown, her tousled golden hair, her eyes staring back bluely. She tried to say something; but nothing would say itself. The brown eyes remained upon her. Beneath their ecstasy and their wonder, there was something that gave Maryan the wish to cry. Something dumb and pleading and loving and faithful, which she had seen last summer in the eyes of a great big doggie when, rolling on his back at her feet, he looked up at her and panted. Again, she tried to speak. This time she succeeded. "*Bonjour, p'tit Jésus,*" she said in French.

The sad mouth trembled into an uncertain smile, and slowly the long-lashed eyes closed again. The head fell back on Elizabeth's lap.

"Beat his hands, Maryan, beat his hands, quick, quick!" Elizabeth cried.

Maryan neared fearfully; she raised one of the hard red little paws in one hand, and with the other began to give it soft pats.

"No, no, hard, slap them hard!" cried Elizabeth.

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"I *am*," assured Maryan, continuing her absurd pattings.

Elizabeth leaned over and unbuttoned the top of the miserable jacket. "Slap him there!" she cried.

But Maryan was at the end of her fortitude. "I can't," she protested. "I'm afraid!"

"Oh, Maryan, try!"

"Nope," said Maryan, with abrupt decision. "I'm going to get mamma!"

"Oh, Maryan, please don't," pleaded Elizabeth, stroking gently the pale forehead beneath her. She knew well that with the coming of elders the best of adventures crumbled, scorched with doubt as by some devastating fire. "Please don't. We'll get him well all by ourselves. Go to the kitchen, and see if you can find a piece of raw beefsteak."

"I'm going to get mamma," repeated Maryan inexorably.

"Oh, Maryan, you always spoil everything!"

But Maryan was already at the door. And thus it was that in the midst of a dreamless sleep, Mother was awakened by a suave breathing in her ear, and the prodigious news: "Ooh, mamsie, come quick; we've got little Jesus in our room, and he's hurted, and can't wake up!"

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The days immediately following were muddled days.

First of all, the children slept no longer in their room. They slept in Mother's room.

And Mother was in their room. She was there, nearly all of the time. When Father had said: "I'll get a trained nurse," Mother had answered: "*I'll* be the trained nurse." And she was, with a white apron.

A big, black doctor came twice a day.

And the little Jesus was in that room! When the door opened, to let Mother or Father or the Doctor in or out, if one were sly enough to be by the door, and looked swiftly, one saw the little Jesus in one's bed, his pale, sweet face on a pillow, and a white bandage about his head.

It was here by this door that one learned most. Whenever the doctor came out, Father was apt to be there. "Tell me quick, Doctor," he would whisper, "what do you think of it?"

"I can speak only of the body," the Doctor would say. "The lad has been ill-treated; but he has a fine, straight body and a rather beautiful head, and no signs of a bad ancestry—which we all have, by the way."

"Then you do not think it would be foolish to——"

"Upon my word, I don't."

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It was here also that, one day, the Doctor turned to Mother, who was seeing him out, and said: "You need have no further worry now. All that is necessary is rest and good food. He's safe."

"Oh, Doctor!" said Mother, taking his right hand in both of hers—and there were tears in her eyes.

The following morning, coming out with Father, she said: "He's the sweetest, gentlest being, Frank! He was delirious the second night, and delirium bares the soul. His soul is pure and white, Frank!"

Father patted her on the shoulder.

"And, Frank, when his eyes are closed, did you notice the shadow beneath his long lashes? And the lashes curl a bit upward. That is the way little—little Harold looked."

Finally, Elizabeth and Maryan were permitted to go in for a short while. He was sitting up in bed. The bandage was still about his head. And when they came toward him, his eyes opened with the same expression with which he had opened them for a moment on Christmas night, and they remained thus, wide, full of ecstasy, wonder and tender pleading.

"*Bonjour, petit Jésus,*" said Maryan, wishing to be polite, and thinking of nothing else to say.

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But Elizabeth had more to communicate. "You won't go back to heaven right away, will you?" she begged. "'Cause I want to play with you when you are well. Then you can tell me all about your home up there; 'bout the little angels, and Mamma Mary and your father and harps and things!"

"Come, come, children, that will do for to-day!" said Mother. "That will do!"

But she went out with them, and said she had something to tell them. They went into the dining-room. She sat down, and they stood hand in hand before her.

"I must tell you things right, dearies," she began, "because you are all mixed up. You think the little boy is the little Jesus, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Elizabeth.

"'Course," said Maryan.

"But he isn't, children, darlings, he isn't! Listen to me, and I will tell you what truly happened.

"You remember, Christmas eve, you tried to stay awake and see the little Jesus?

"Well, you fell asleep, and he came while you were asleep.

"He brought many toys for you, and laid them by your shoes, and still you were asleep. Then he thought of Father and Mother, and how they

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did not have any toys and felt bad because they had lost their little son, and guess what he did?"

"What?"

"Wat?"

"He went back, and got a poor little boy who was unhappy, and brought him for Father and Mother, to console them. But the little boy was pretty heavy for him, and he let him fall down the chimney, and hurt him without meaning to, and went away for good without knowing it. He had to hurry, because you were awakening.

"It was this little boy you found in the chimney, and not little Jesus. He has been ill; but he is well now, and he's going to stay here always and be our own son—Father's and mine. Now, aren't you glad, and isn't this as pretty as the other way?"

"I don't know," said Elizabeth, pouting uncertainly.

"Don't know," said Maryan.

But a light came into Elizabeth's eye. "Then, if he is your little son, he's our little brother?"

"He's our little bruzzer?"

"Certainly," answered Mother. "He's your own dear brother."

"And we can play with him?"

"Of course."

"Any game we want?"

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"Any game you want."

"Then," said Elizabeth, "we'll play that he *is* little Jesus, and that he *did* come down the chimney!"

Which they do, sometimes. But his name is Harold.

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THE KING'S CAPRICE

THE Beef King paced with light and slender diligence the promenade deck of the Cryptomania, cleaving her way somberly through the spectral winter sea. The line he strode was perfect; it began each time at the same pillar, and it ended each time just three feet from the rail that separated the first-class passengers from those of the second cabin. Each time, with military precision, he pivoted there at the rail, and each time his close-shaven mouth, radiating a multitude of fine lines that made it look like a purse with strings very tightly drawn, raised one of its corners guardedly and mumbled quickly a number.

The big ship was sliding through a smooth sea, heavy and gray as lead; at times, from the shifting and colorless sky above, mists like great birds swooped down upon her, and then, frigidly enveloped, she cried aloud, a great, sad cry, at once blustering and dolorous.

But the Beef King did not see the sea, nor the skies, nor the mists. He lacked vision. The ship, to him, was a hotel that moved. He had not the

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power to detach himself from it and, looking down from above, to see it small and fragile and lone in a fluid chaos. And neither did he see, spread over the face of the earth, the myriad kine grazing for him with bended heads. They were transmuting, for him, grass made of water, air, and sunshine, into flesh which he turned into gold. He did not see the men toiling for him beneath the sky, in slaughter-pen, in packing-house, in shop; nor the lines of laden cars puffing across the land, nor the wide-flanked ships radiating the deep, for him. Nor the squirm of the multitudes when, with his long, livid index finger, he pressed upon them.

He saw all those things only from very near, and abstractedly—the cattle, in pounds; the puffing trains, the gliding ships, as black and red lines drawn across maps; those that worked for him, as salaries and results; the multitudes, as an appetite; his power, in figures; in huge, leather-bound books and reports and balances; in banks and in gold. And men he saw as pawns.

A gong clamored along the corridors; a bugle sounded from a bridge. The Beef King went down to his lunch.

There were only a few passengers for this winter passage, and the high-domed dining-room was dull. But to the Beef King it was all the same.

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He sat alone at a small table, waving aside offered dishes till his valet brought him a gruel prepared for himself in his own cabin on his own alcohol stove according to a carefully studied and aseptic recipe.

When he had eaten, he lay down for an hour and then resumed his pacing on deck. It was very cold, and to his apparel he had added a muffler which covered his purse-like mouth and showed only his eyes, keenly blue, which, like the now hidden mouth, radiated also fine lines.

As he walked, trying to keep his attention solely upon his walking, he was assailed, as by gnats, by a flight of figures. Once he had been their absolute master, they, his slaves. Now that he tried to be rid of them, they enslaved him. In spite of his efforts he could not free himself completely; they attacked him often, in buzzing clouds. But besides this, he was vaguely and yet heavily aware of another trouble. It was a feeling such as had been wont to come to him in the days of his youth; when, at school, having finished his sums first, he sat idle at his desk. Then there came within him a restlessness, and about him an emptiness. He yawned, tormented by a vague and yet immense dissatisfaction. Other children, then, saw the fleck of sun upon the floor, a bee buzzing by, the flitting of a swal-

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low across the window's blue square. But he, when idle, was in a black vacuum. And now, for the last two years, this feeling had been with him much—enveloping, overpowering. Two years ago, on the advice of grave, black-frocked persons who had thumped him and tapped him and analyzed him, he had dropped the major part of his activities. Since then the feeling had been with him. To fight it he had done many things. He had tried society; he had dined, he had fêted. He had tried sports; he had ridden, he had played golf. These things proving unavailing, he had taken to charity. He had endowed universities, libraries; he had founded a gigantic trust which gave mechanically, automatically, like some monstrous sausage machine. Thus he had almost trapped God; hysterical old ladies in church alcoves had kissed his hand and had declared him the Benefactor of Mankind. But still the feeling had been with him, waxing each day—a restlessness and a dissatisfaction, a weariness, an emptiness, a distaste heavy upon his tongue.

The Beef King came to the rail separating the first from the second-class, and, as he pivoted, something suave and fluid slid by his cheek, something imponderable, sweet and blue. It was the shy yet friendly glance of a little child.

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The Beef King left the rail hurriedly. As he paced away, his hand, instinctively, flapped two or three times by his face as if to brush away a mosquito. By the time he had reached the pillar on the other side he realized that the sensation he was thus seeking to frighten away had been a subtly pleasing one; and, returning, his eyes sought the child.

It was a little girl. Her hand in the hand of a man who was squat, heavy and awkward, she was circling slowly the second-class deck. She was a very little girl. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes very blue; she was wrapped in an overcoat and hood of furry, silvery stuff, and her fresh little pink face, with its border of blondish bangs, in that hood, made of her a baby-bunting—one of those baby-buntings to be seen at Easter time, in candy-store windows. She reached her side of the rail at the same time the Beef King reached his, and, walking very demurely, slid toward him from beneath her long lashes a glance of discreet greeting.

The Beef King paced away with great, long strides. There was a spring to his feet; his chest expanded as though he were taking his morning breathing exercises; and the numbers buzzed no longer about his head. By the time he had reached the forward turning-point, though, he

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had become distrustful of this unwonted trepidation; he stopped there, face to the wind.

Almost immediately the numbers again attacked him, and about him gathered the big emptiness. He returned, hesitating. When he reached the rail, no one was in sight. He waited, and soon, from behind a deck-house she appeared, her hand in that of her elderly escort. She walked with much dignity, looking neither to the right nor to the left; her red lips were tightened demurely. But again, as she passed, without turning her head she flashed beneath her long lashes her strange little look, at once confidential, appealing and reserved.

The Beef King, for the rest of the afternoon, continued his diligent striding. But each time he arranged it so as to reach the rail at the same time as the child; and each time he obtained from her the subtle, blue glance, at once shy and intimate, as though between them, between the little girl and the great big King, there existed a certain secret, an infantile bond known only to themselves. The numbers had fled; the big emptiness had lifted. Each turn was an adventure, and the King was no longer bored.

The next morning the child and its companion were not on deck. It was cold. The ship hissed across the sea colorless and lifeless as the begin-

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ning of the world; at intervals, the mists swooped down upon her and, enveloped, as if oppressed, she roared her hoarse, sad warning. The Beef King concentrated himself upon his prescribed walking. He shut out the memory of yesterday, which he viewed disapprovingly now, and with some shame. But he could not hide from himself the fact that the vast boredom was again encroaching upon him.

He saw her again, however, when he stepped out upon deck after his lunch and his rest. She was stretched in a long chair near the dividing rail, and all wrapped up, like a little bear whose face might be pink. Her elderly companion stood by her, leaning against the wall of a deck-house. The Beef King strode up and down for half an hour without seeming to notice them; then, yielding to a constant tugging, he leaned over the rail and, without looking at the child, engaged the man in talk.

The man, it seemed, was not the father, nor any relative of the child. The mother of the child had died, and the father was working hard. The man, taking a trip back home, had volunteered to take the child to her grandmother in Sweden.

While obtaining these facts, the Beef King, tormented by a strange shyness, looked above and past the little girl. But when, unconsciously, his

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glance fell upon her, right away she gave him her small greeting—the slight, blue smile of her eyes, while her lips, her head, her whole little body, remaining immobile, preserved her dignity. And before he knew it, the Beef King had made an enormous advance. "What is your name, little girl?" he heard his voice say.

Her red lips curled. She answered: "Mary."

"How do you do, Mary?" he pursued intrepidly, and shook her hand.

But in her hand she held a string. "Play horsie with me," she invited amiably. "Please play horsie with me."

The Beef King spread out the figers of his right hand. She tied one end of the string to his index finger, the other end to his ring finger. "Gee up," she called, clucking her tongue.

The Beef King danced his hand up and down. From the child there streamed suddenly a pearly string of joyous notes; they went through the crabbed man's soul like a cascade of clear waters. And, intoxicated, the Beef King embarked in a flight of fancy prodigious for him. He hid his hand in the folds of the blankets wrapping the child and said: "Now the horse is in the stable, eating hay!"

Her eyes were upon him like twin stars. "Yeth," she agreed.

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"Now the horse is out again," he pursued.

"Yeth. Gee up!"

And the Beef King's hand danced up and down, and shied and pranced.

That night the big swift ship passed over a sunken hull, floating malevolent and dead beneath the glazed surface. The Beef King, lying sleepless on his berth, felt the tremendous thudding below, felt, beneath him, the ship lift, lift, lift, and then sag down again swoopingly, with a sickish relaxation as though its back had yielded. He got up quietly and turned the electric button. He held no illusions as to that blow. There had been no crash, no resonance; but in the very treacherous softness of it, its dullness as of soft flesh crunched, there had been something deadly as the silent slipping of steel into vital parts.

He stood a moment in the center of the cabin, listening. The ship was going on, humming elastically as before. But along the corridors, doors were banging; voices scared and muffled were calling. A drone of hurrying feet passed overhead. The Beef King opened the door to the second chamber of the suite. He did not need to call; the valet was up, disheveled and awe-stricken. "Go up on deck right away," the mas-

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ter ordered. "Find out. As soon as there is danger, come down and tell me."

The man, throwing on a few garments, hastened out. The Beef King, left alone, moved swiftly and calmly. His gestures were sober and sure as though he had mentally rehearsed them many times before. Snapping open his flat trunk, he put successively on his lean body three suits of thick, woolen underwear. Over his clothes he slipped a shaggy sweater, a fur-lined overcoat, and over the whole a wide loose cape of waterproof material. Clothed now, he opened a small steel coffer and, taking out three papers, burned them. One showed that he owned a high court, another that a legislature was his, and the third was a bond upon the soul of a man who led multitudes. This done, he folded into its compact box his alcohol stove, placed it in one overcoat pocket with a flask of its liquid fuel and a thermal bottle, and in the other pocket placed, together with a can of condensed milk, a package of the desiccated cereal on which he so often dined.

The vibration of the ship suddenly ceased as he completed these preparations; and in the breathless silence, the siren began to scream hysterically, scream upon scream. He stepped out, closing the door behind him, and hastened to-

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ward the smoking-room. The lights went out as he reached it; groping in the darkness, he gathered to himself a supply of matches and finally came out upon deck.

He stood in the frame of the saloon entrance, keenly observant. The night was very black; the ship seemed afloat upon blackness and not upon the invisible sea. Above, the siren screamed; steam roared. The electric lights were all out; here and there smoky torches cast upon a wall, upon a floor, puddles of soiled flame. The passengers, a dark mass, were pressing about the boats. There was no panic, but a good deal of crowding and milling. Black behind the red of a torch, the captain was on the bridge; he leaned, immobile, over the rail, looking down upon the people, and seemed to listen intently. The siren ceased with a soundless gasp like a cry in a dream. And the Beef King heard then the sharp orders of the officers, herding the passengers, the wailing of a woman, the creaking of pulleys, and then, lower, beneath the flank of the ship, the soft moving of oars in the tholes of a boat already launched and standing by.

Several times, on former voyages, the Beef King, who in this life left nothing to chance, had observed carefully the boat-drills. He had noted that while some of the boats were manned mostly

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by sailors and real men of the sea, others, the ruck of them, were largely in the hands of waiters, mess-boys, stewards and barbers; and he had decided which of the small craft, in case of any possible accident, he would take—that of the first officer or of one of the mates. As he looked now, however, he saw that in his calculations he had overlooked an important element. These boats were being filled with the women and the children; not all the gold he commanded could buy him a place in one of them. He smiled, grimly. It was just as well thus. Those boats, to his mind, were being much overladen. He saw one descend slowly into the lightless well at the bottom of which lay the invisible sea; it was like a human cluster of grapes. He remained at the door, biding his time. The thing to do was to leave on a boat less crowded; a boat less crowded and which yet would leave—in time. There was here a delicate balance, difficult to establish. One of the elements of the problem—the crowding—he had before his eyes. The other element—the time—escaped his sagacity, his steel-trap sagacity. The Beef King looked up at the captain, leaning there on the bridge as if listening—listening to secret sounds; to sighs, to gurgles, to wails within the ripped carcass of

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his ship; to indices that told a story to him but to the Beef King nothing. He looked at the captain as if to wrest from him the indications he needed. But the captain stood immobile, as if frozen. Leaning far over, his head inclined a bit toward his right shoulder, he seemed to listen, but divulged nothing.

The Beef King took his eyes abruptly from the captain. Something warm and soft had nestled in the palm of his hanging hand; something slender and yet insistent had coiled about the little finger of that hand. He looked down. The child Mary was there. She was all dressed in her coat and hood, and looked more than ever like a baby-bunting. Her hand was in his; she stood by his side, demure, looking straight ahead as though she belonged there, as though it was her place and she was there for ever.

"Where's your guardian?" asked the Beef King sharply. "Quick! Where's your guardian?"

Even as he spoke, he was aware of the gentle warmth of her hand; it was stealing up his arm, up to his chest, to a place there which he had seldom felt.

She answered without turning her head, without moving, as though, from now on, she would never have to move. "He's gone," she said sim-

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ply. "He said, 'I'll come right back.' But he did not come right back."

"We must find him," the Beef King said nervously. "Or——no——quick——Come. I'll put you in a boat with the women."

He was pressing forward toward a boat on the point of being launched. But she, holding his hand, drew back. He looked down upon her. Her eyes were toward him, round and pleading; her red lips smiled their little, reserved smile. "*You* stay with me," she lisped. "Stay with me and play horsie."

The boat, freighted with humanity, was slipping down toward the sea. "All right," said the Beef King, making one of his absolute decisions, "I'll stay with you."

"We'll take a walk behind," he said after a moment. It seemed to him that toward the deserted stern, a vague movement was going on. As they approached, the thing defined itself. Upon the elevated after-deck, shadowy creatures were working at a lone boat. They had it off the stays; it was beginning to swing. The Beef King, carrying the child, climbed the ladder and reached the deck. Some six or eight men, indistinct in the blackness, were pushing and hauling, whispering curses, furtive and hurried. The Beef King saw the nearest plainly; a stoker with

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undershirt open to the waist beneath the unbuttoned coat. "Who are you?" bawled a voice. "Get your hide out of here; we're going it alone!"

The Beef King held up the child. Between three men on the other side, whispers passed. "Get in," bawled the voice. "But keep your mouth shut."

The Beef King entered the boat and sat down at the stern, the child on his knees. There was a scramble after him, he felt the boat sinking; there was a soft splash, and then the undulation of the craft on its own element. Close at hand rose the high, black wall of the ship. Puffs of the fog which now was again descending upon the sea, slid down along this black wall like wreaths from a giant smoker's breath. Hooks and oars pushed against it; to the attack it seemed to withdraw, and then suddenly disappeared. The boat remained alone in the center of a small chamber carved out of the fog and the night.

They rowed off a bit, and then stood by, rising and falling softly in the muffled darkness, upon the invisible sea. The Beef King, crouching beneath the stern-sheets, observed his companions. He could make them out little by little. There were six of them. They were stokers; they had come up at the last moment, panting up inter-

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minable ladders; grime and the sweat of their toil lay frozen upon their faces. The Beef King frowned disapprovingly. They were thinly clad; some had merely thrown jackets upon their undershirts; the feet of one were bare in his heavy clogs; the improvidence of it!

He sat upon the bottom-boards, leaning against the break of the stern-sheets, while above him the rudder-arm swung idly to and fro, and he held the child in his arms. From inside the furry hood, her blue eyes gazed calmly up at him. After a time, he saw that the blue eyes were closing. Taking off his overcoat, he wrapped her in it, keeping for himself the big cape, and laid her down at his feet.

After a while, from afar, a voice called out over the sea. It was the captain, from his own boat giving orders to the others. "Stand by! stand by!" he urged. "We're in the path of vessels. We spoke the Abyssinia by wireless before we went down. She'll be along here, looking for us, in forty-eight hours. Keep your positions; stand by! stand by!"

The disturbed silence came spreading back over the sea. The men, taking up the oars, rowed gently, keeping the boat's head to the swell. The hours passed heavy and dead. The Beef King sat immobile, wrapped in his big cape. At his feet

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the child slept. Before morning he aroused himself and, hiding the blue flame of the alcohol stove behind the spread cloak, heated milk and fed himself and the child. The child, having eaten, dropped to sleep again.

The black wall of the night grayed little by little, and the day came, sunless and opaque. The men forward broached the barrel of biscuits and the keg of water, passing rations back to the Beef King and the child. They then resumed their rowing, pressing the oars just enough to keep the boat's head to the swell. The fog weighed upon them. They hardly spoke. Some time in the afternoon, through a sudden rift, they saw one of the other boats. It appeared for just a moment, like a vision in a dream, laden deep with women and children that huddled and were embraced. Then some capricious current swept the boats apart. The fog closed again. For a little while murmurs came creeping along the water; muffled wails, lamentations, sighs; then the silence dropped down again like a cloak. The child lay at the feet of the Beef King, alternately sleeping long hours, for long hours gazing silently up at him; and his wrinkled old mouth was pursed very tightly.

When the day was done, the fog fled, leaving a black night beneath an unlit vault, and the

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wind began to blow. It blew increasingly; in a few hours the boat was dipping to a breaking sea, and the rowing had become an unremitting toil to keep her head on. Toward midnight a gruff voice called the Beef King to do his share. But he was inexperienced and awkward; his sedentary limbs refused to obey him and, more gruffly than he had been called, he was sent back to his corner, cursed and derided. All night the wind blew in squalls, pushing away, in fierce thrusts, the boat along the waters, and all night the men toiled at the oars. And again, under cover of the darkness and of his big cloak, the Beef King managed to heat his thermal bottle full of milk to keep the child and himself warm and nourished.

When morning broke, livid upon a livid sea, the boat was all alone within the circle of the horizon. All day they tossed in an increasing wind, four men in turn at the oars, while two huddled tightly at the bow. It became colder and colder, and it was only the labor at the oars and the curling of body against body when at rest that kept the blood liquid within their veins. At noon, they saw something which looked like a big dead fish; but passing near, they recognized one of the ship's boats, bottom up and awash. The child did not see it; wrapped up in the coat, she lay

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at the Beef King's feet, alternately looking upward and sleeping.

With the night came a still further increase of the cold; at intervals, a sleet whipping down from the low sky flagellated them. Waves, slapping inboard, froze upon the bow. The Beef King took off his waterproof. With a coil of rope, he made a small platform, raised from the footboard. Upon it he spread the big cape and his heavy overcoat. Laying the child on this, he lashed it about her in a nest out of which only her little nose peeped.

All night the Beef King sat stiff and erect, in vigil over the warm nest. In the obscurity he could see vaguely the forms of the men forward; he heard the play of the oars in the tholes. The cold, coming down from the sky, seized him with a grip of iron. It had weight, it pressed like a weight at the pit of his stomach. But he remained as he was, silent and immobile. About his mouth the cords were drawn tight; it was as if thus he kept within himself, through unremitting vigilance, the flame of life, which, light and fugitive, sought to flit away. Toward midnight the rowing ceased. The men were working at something, heads together. There was a splash at the bow, and the boat, swinging, again rode steadily with head to the breaking waves. The

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Beef King surmised that they had made a sea anchor and had gone to sleep. He could define them forward in the shelter of the bow, huddled in a dark mass.

The cold grew more intense. The Beef King heated the last of his milk. He fed the child who again went to sleep, dry and warm in her nest, and during the remainder of the long night he kept himself alive by small mouthfuls of the hot liquid.

The day broke upon an ugly sea; and after a while, through a rift in the leaden cap of the sky, a pale sun streamed slantingly down upon the boat. The Beef King felt himself vivified, though the cold still weighed upon his breast. The child awoke, and like a bird, from her nest, began to prattle. "Play horse," she commanded; play horsie with me." Stooping, the Beef King played horse. His blue and numbed hand danced up and down at her behest, hid itself and "ate hay," pranced and galloped, and the laughter of the child flew on silver wings over the sad and glacial sea, over the motionless men huddled in the bow.

Something about the position of these, at length, caused the Beef King to raise his voice and call them. His voice was weak, but it gained strength with the reiteration of his shouts. He

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shouted, each summons more troubled and urgent. But they did not answer. They lay there, entangled, one upon the other, in attitudes curiously cuddled, like that of puppies gone to sleep while nosing and scrambling to get closer to their mother, their warm and bountiful mother; and they did not answer. Neither did they stir. The child's voice flitted over them like a butterfly; the worn man's voice boomed and crackled; but they did not stir. Finally the Beef King, rising on his stiff and dolorous legs, staggered forward to them. He stood there at the bow a moment, contemplatively, then silently returned and sat down again by the child. The men forward were dead. The cold, during the night, had stooped down to them out of the sky, and, taking in turn the heart of each in its icy hands, had stilled it.

The Beef King, now no longer having to hide, made a gruel with which they breakfasted. When the child was again asleep, he crept to the bow and tried to do his duty by the bodies lying there. The water, though, slapping inboard, had frozen upon them; they were wrapped, inseparable, in an icy shroud which his waning strength could not tear. He returned to his station by the sleeping child.

The pale sun went out and the wind took up again. Upon the large swells, smaller waves

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creamed. They ran choppingly at the boat, slapped it, climbed it; and as they climbed, the water froze, and little by little, before his eyes, the Beef King saw the men lying forward incased in a frigid and transparent sepulcher. He sat yet erect, looking ahead with spectral eyes; and his mouth was pursed tight and held still within him his life. Thus the day passed; and then, with the night, the child awoke and complained of being cold.

The Beef King re-wrapped her carefully in the overcoat and the cape. He gave her again some hot gruel, and she went to sleep in the tight shelter of her nest. The night went by slowly, percolating with cruel deliberation its intolerable seconds. The cold became no longer a pain; it wore a false smile; it was gentle and insistent; it crooned and caressed. But the grim old man knew, and fought. His pursed mouth did not relax; his eyelids refused to droop. But many times, before morning, he had to sacrifice drops and drops of his precious alcohol, to huddle over the small blue flame, almost enwrapping it.

It was a glazed and dead morning. The wind had died; the sea undulated in long oily swells, gray beneath the gray sky, bound by a gray horizon, the lone, sad sea of some dead planet. There were no birds above, no splash of fish below; and

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the boat, steadied by its floating anchor, rose and fell silently, rose toward the gray sky, fell away from it, yawed a bit, without a gurgle, without a splash, its cargo of frozen men heavy at the bow; and beneath the great dome there was nothing but the cold, the cold invisible, impalpable and hushed, but heavily insistent. At the feet of the old man, the child slept in her nest. He stood up and scanned the horizon. Even allowing for the drift of the boat, the Abyssinia should be along, searching. He looked carefully, and finally, to the east, beneath a pale puddle of sun in the sky, he saw a faint pencil of smoke.

He sat down and the smoke disappeared. When he had again the strength, he rose again. The smoke was still there, a faint charcoal smudge on the horizon. He sat down and he lost it. When he was down, he could not see it; but he could stand up at long intervals. Rising thus intermittently for short periods, he observed the progress of the smoke on the horizon. It was not nearing. It was going from left to right, at right angles to the course that would take it to the boat. After a while, it cut through the circle of sky and sea far to the north, and was out of sight.

But an hour after, perhaps, it reappeared, cutting back within the circle of the horizon, and

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this time it was going south. Slowly it went across the sky, from right to left, and again disappeared, this time in the southeast.

The Beef King waited patiently, arising only at long intervals. At length the smoke came into sight again where it had vanished. It held its original course now, but was a bit nearer. The Beef King understood. It was the Abyssinia. And she was nearing in long side-to-side tacks, carefully cruising the sea, searching the territory of the disaster.

They were saved. He smiled an iron smile. Not saved; but at least, they would be found. Watch in hand, observing the course of the relief vessel, he tried to calculate when she would be near. But the figures of which he had once been a master now evaded him mockingly. His very brain was numb with the cold. He only knew that it would be very long before the boat arrived, very long, toward sunset perhaps. His eyelids closed, remained a long moment pasted upon his vitreous eyes. He shook himself free and, leaning over, raised a flap of the child's covers and peered within. The child was weeping. Cuddled upon herself, she was weeping softly within her nest. "What is the matter, Mary?" he asked; "what is the matter, babe?"

But she would not tell him. Pressing her face

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farther within the folds enveloping her, she continued to weep silently.

At length he drew from her what was the matter. The child was again cold.

The old man sat a moment motionless, debating within himself a question. Once he looked up, toward the horizon; but sitting as he was, he could not see the smoke. With a nod he came to his conclusion. He took off his sweater and added it to the child's coverings.

Once again, as he held the nearly empty alcohol bottle up to the light, he fell into a period of cogitation; and once again a short, curt nod announced his arrival to a decision. He poured out what remained of the spirits into the little stove, lit it, and made a quantity of gruel nicely calculated to the life of the flame. When, simultaneously, the last flicker of fire had sputtered out and the cooking was done, he gave a part of the food to the child and, pouring the remainder in the thermal bottle, he placed it within her nest, by her side. "When you are hungry, or when you are cold," he said, "take some of this. I'm going to sleep now, so don't call me. Just wait in your little house. By-and-by a big ship will come to get you. So now, go to sleep."

But she did not want to go to sleep. She wanted to play horse. So, with a good deal of

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effort, he danced his palsied old hand a while for her till, in the midst of a laugh, the slumber god seized her. Drawing the enveloping garments close about her, he sat down by her side.

Far off, the rescuing ship's black streamer was slowly sweeping the sky, back and forth, nearing gradually. But the Beef King could no longer see it; a haze was over his eyes. The cold now was caressing his very heart. He nodded; he dozed for several minutes. When he shook himself awake, it was to the urgency of a new idea—an idea which at once excited him and made him ashamed. He gazed about, over the boat, at the frozen huddle forward, sidelong glances, avaricious and distrustful. He glanced far off toward the horizon, along the gray and glacial sea, again like a miser about to count his gold. In all the mournful immensity there was no one to witness him; reassured, he moved quickly. Throwing himself on his knees by the child-bundle, he threw open with one feeble gesture the garments, and snatched her to his breast.

He held her there not long. He had fear of the cold. Just for a short moment he felt against him the gentle flutter as of a feather moved by a breeze, the mild, soft warmth of her; then he placed her down again, still asleep, and rewrapped her with minute care. Again his side-

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long glance swept the boat, swept the sea and sky. And satisfied that he had not been seen, he sat down again at his place by her side.

His eyes closed, opened, closed, and remained closed. His chin came down to his chest; he snored a bit. Then this grotesque and earthly slumber changed gradually to a sleep which was silent, tranquil and noble.

Thus it happened that at sun-down the Abyssinia, after a long day's cruising through a charnel sea, came upon a boat over which watched, grim and still erect, a dead man; and that the rescuers, returning in the yawl, bore upward with them, to the high and crowded decks, a little girl cooing, palpitant and warm, by miracle sole survivor of the wrecked Cryptomania.

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THE GIFT

MARTHA blew out the bigger lamp, leaving only the small one burning on the kitchen table. She covered up the cages. Polly answered the movement with a shrill rageful laugh, then submitted and was silent; the squirrel ceased revolving, there was a sly cracking of a nut and then, there too, also silence. Between the cages Martha had whisked up a blind, then pulled it down quickly again, for the wide reach of white land, with the long silhouette of the church black against it, had sharply resolved into a definite pang an oppression vague about her all day. She stood now a moment in the middle of the room, uncertain and afraid. A water-pipe, gripped by the cold, clanged resoundingly. As if awakened by the sound, Martha dropped on her knees by the stove, reached beneath it, drew to her an open box, and peered beneath the blankets huddled in it. A meager wisp of gray hair fell across her eyes, and with a wearied gesture she caught it and carefully smoothed it behind her ear. Then, bending low,

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with her lips against the rim of the box, she said, "Minnie, Minnie, little girl!"

A cat lay among the blankets in the box. It lay stretched at full length, stiffly; its eyes were shut, and its triangular head, with ears drawn back, was very flat upon the crossed fore-paws.

"Minnie, Minnie," Martha went on, her lips now close to the furry head; "Minnie, little girl, do you hurt very much; does it hurt very much, Minnie?"

But the cat gave no heed. It remained as it was, stretched with tight-closed eyes, as if in immense concentration of resistance against the powers of Pain.

Martha sat on the floor and began to stroke the roughened coat with a long tender movement; a grip was at her throat and a fear at her heart. After a while she bent down and kissed the animal between the eyes. Then, intimately, she whispered, "Minnie, you won't leave me, little girl, will you? You won't leave me?"

But the cat kept on dying.

"You must not leave me, because, you see, I couldn't get along without you, Minnie," went on the old woman, arguing with the grim Inconvinceable, "I simply couldn't; what would I do, Minnie, without you, without my little daughter,

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my sweet little daughter? You must not leave me, Minnie."

The cat opened its mouth as if to yawn; a long, sigh passed in an undulation along the stretched body—and it remained thus, mouth open, and rigid.

Martha looked upon the animal with hard, dry eyes. The grip at her throat had become of iron, and a cold frenzy of revolt like a tide was rising to her head. Again alone. Again alone and desolate. Sacrifice in youth, loneliness in age—that was her lot. Sacrifice in youth, loneliness in age—that was her lot. To others love, warmth of hearths, the soft lips of babes at the breast; for her, sacrifice in youth, loneliness in age—that was her lot. A curse was upon her. In her hands things died; flowers died, love died and Minnie died. It was her lot.

The clock ticked resoundingly. After a while the clamor of her woe rhythmed itself to that ticking, and the clock began to say measuredly, solemnly: "Again-alone; again-alone." Sometimes it changed to "Sacrifice in youth; loneliness in age"; then it returned to the first refrain, "Again-alone; again-alone." And the grip upon her throat, with each swing of the pendulum, tightened.

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Ten years ago she had found Minnie, a squalling kitten starving in the gutter. She had taken it home and had fed it warm milk with a sponge. It had lived; it had become the companion, the sweet companion in her arid life. Now it was dead.

What a prankish kitten it had been the first year, what a sweet prankish kitten! When Martha knitted, it sat demure in a chair near-by. Then, when the wonder grew too great and demanded corroboration, it sprang, all of one bound, upon the lap of the knitter, and in its nervous claws caught the yarn. What a child, that kitten, what an amusing child—and later, the daughter, the tender elder daughter.

Suddenly Martha felt the grip upon her throat relaxing. From far in the distance, somewhere at the edge of the wide snow-clad plains surrounding the village, there was coming to her, faint and humming as the tremble of a tuning-fork, the sound of a bell; as if in answer, from another confine, clear and high like the soprano of a child, a second came winging; they joined, a third leaped up vibrant into the sky, another; far, near, the bells of the land, joining hands, were springing up into the frosty, starry air. They danced; they crossed and recrossed; their voices chimed in silvery babbling. Then, very

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close, with a clang and a grave vibration that tingled through the core of Martha's being, the village church toned the tidings. It was Christmas midnight.

Martha slid out upon the floor and began to weep. The tears came hard at first; they were corrosive as molten lead, spasms twitched her face; then a languor passed over her like a caress, and she wept freely, with abandonment, in a great outburst of self-pity. She wept over the love denied her, the hearth she had not known, the children she had not had. She wept over her poverty, her hopeless ugliness. The tears, restrained through so many arid years, now poured forth, uncontrollable. She wept over Rob, the boy she had secretly loved at school; over a brother who had died before she was born; over a doll she had broken forty years ago. The fire had gone out, the lamp was dying; the cold, pressing about the house like a great colorless and impalpable sea, was invading the room through crack and chink; it touched her heart, but she lay there on the floor and she wept. The tears welled from her freely, warmly, without a sob, and with them were flowing bitterness and tension; it was as if her veins had been opened, and it was her blood that was leaving her; gradually an exquisite swoon was enveloping her—

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And then a singular thing happened. The coverlet upon the box humped up slowly, three claws appeared on the edge, and with a thump Minnie landed on all-fours close to Martha's head, immediately arching her back for a caress.

"Minnie!" cried Martha, rising to her knees.

"Pr-r-r," went Minnie.

"Oh, Minnie," whispered the old woman, gathering the cat up in her arms, "Minnie, I thought you were dead. I thought you were dead. I was crying, see, Minnie?" She raised her hand to her eyes and brought it back bedewed.

But Minnie seemed in no sentimental mood. She sprang out of the encircling arms, ran lightly to the door, scratched it and mewed, ran back to Martha, pulled at her dress with her claws, glided again to the door, scratched it and mewed, came back to Martha, took her skirt in her teeth, and tugged at it imperiously.

Martha went to the door and opened it. Minnie bounded out, then returned, and again pulled at the dress. Martha stepped out, Minnie placed herself ahead with a determined and capable air, and led the way down the deserted street. Martha followed.

She was soon lost. Minnie impetuously had dashed into passage after passage, plunged in

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heavy blue shadows; they turned, doubled back, zigzagged; the ways were curiously intricate; Martha's weary old head was soon muddled. The whole land, anyway, had been transformed. The livid sheet of snow which for weeks had stretched without break to the horizon line had vanished. They trod, now, a crackling yellow earth. The streets were narrow, the houses nearly touched; they were shaped like dice and were flat-roofed. Upon these roofs there poured a moonlight weirdly violent, but the tortuous alleys remained dark, lit only with rare moon-splashes. Once they passed a strange tree, nude of trunk and plume-topped, that threw a shadow like a mushroom. In the east, a big blue star hung like a censer.

Through all this Minnie trod her way with high-pawed assurance, and Martha followed her jealously, as her only link to reality and sanity. Finally they dived into a black blind alley. A wall scraped Martha's shoulder; Minnie stopped before a rude door with glowing cracks; Martha lifted the latch and stepped in. The warm breath of kine struck her face softly; from all sides, in the darkness, there came to her a subdued crunching of hay. In the depths of the stable a lantern shed a circle of light upon the manger below it. Minnie bounded down the narrow passage,

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leaped up into the air, and vanished within this manger. Martha ran after her, "Oh, Minnie!" she remonstrated, peering in.

For Minnie, curled and purring, lay with her head upon the breast of a babe, asleep there in the golden grass of the manger.

It slept there, both arms outspread with open palms, in a posture of surrender, a rosy babe with a crown of yellow curls, slightly damp, about its brow. Its lips, half-open, let pass its breathing, light as a southern zephyr, but with inflections as of sighs. Beneath the long lashes of the closed eyes, violet shadows lurked, and the corners of the mouth drooped slightly, as though it had been weeping and were not yet consoled. It slept there, rosy upon the golden straw, its arms outspread; its bared little breast rose and fell, between the parted lips its breathing passed like sighs, and in the flicker of the lantern the shadows beneath the eyes, the shadows about the mouth, pulsed, now lighter, now darker. A majesty emanated from the little being. It was as if, asleep here in the subtle waves, there came to him, for him to suffer, all of the ache scattered that night over the vastness of the globe. Martha, leaning over breathless, felt gradually a desire strong as a pang mount through her being. She wanted to take up this sweet, sad babe and

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hug it to her heart. Her arms opened; she leaned—

But she drew back, afraid. The quiet, the mystery of the hour; the lone light blazing there like an altar-lamp; the singular majesty emanating from the strange child, rosy like a babe, sad like a man—all this filled her with awe.

"Minnie," she whispered, "Minnie, come away quick; oh, come away!"

But Minnie seemed free of Martha's complex emotions. She merely purred louder and, pushing her nose into the folds of the child's garments, snuggled up closer.

"Minnie!" Martha whispered reproachfully.

Her eyes again settled upon the tremulous mouth of the babe, and she remained there, longing but afraid, a tenderness, at the pit of her being, poignant as a pain.

And then the child awoke. It opened its eyes, blue and damply luminous as a dewy star at dawn, and gazed up at the old woman. It looked —at the worn patient face, the humble yearning eyes—looked long, calmly, comprehendingly; then in a passionate movement its arms shot upward. With a gurgling cry, Martha stooped and gathered it up to her breast.

She was infinitely happy now, pacing to and

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fro, the child in her arms, her murmuring lips among its curls, upon the eyes, the sad mouth. Its palpitating warmth penetrated her bosom, and a heaviness was within her; it was as if the little body had crept into her being and had coiled itself, gentle, trusting, familiar, about her heart. A brooding tenderness, heavy almost as a woe, went torpidly through her veins; she panted.

After a while the sense of a presence behind her made her turn. It was the mother. Martha knew it was the mother from the expression of slightly jealous solicitude, passing like a flash, in the look she gave the child. "Oh," she cried, startled and humble; "oh, it is your baby; you want it!" And she held it out.

But the mother was gazing at her now, and in her wide soft eyes there was the same absolute comprehension so strange in the child. "Yes," she said—and her voice was like gold, like a bell of gold, slightly muffled, like a bell of gold muffled with crêpe—"yes, it is mine; hold it—you have no child."

Martha, in trembling ecstasy, pressed the child back to her. "I have no child," she echoed; "never have I had a child; never will I have a child!"

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The eyes of the mother were upon her, full of their grave understanding.

"And this is your child," Martha went on, an envy passing through her like a gust; "this is your child, and how happy you are, and how happy you will be!"

But the mother, now, was gazing past Martha, gazing as between veils torn open, into a future profundity; her eyes dilated, dilated, and became of stone, granitic lines furrowed her visage—and she looked, looked, looked, thus, the mask of Fear and Woe imprinted upon her flesh, long, madly and passionately. Then the Fear, the horror went out, the lines softened, the eyes liquefied, became like pools reflecting a sorrow august and tender with resignation and understanding, and she said (and her voice was like that of a golden bell muffled with crêpe): "Yes, I am happy; nevertheless, I am happy—nevertheless."

An exaltation was rising through Martha, a madness of daring. "Give me the child," she cried boldly, arching her arms about it in a gesture of possession; "give me the child; give it to me!"

The mother looked at her with sweet gravity. "Why do you wish the child; what can you give it, what can you do for it?"

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"I would give it happiness," cried Martha, audaciously. "Happiness! I would shield it; it would never know cold, hunger, the bitterness of winds, the bite of men; my warmth would be about him, always, like a caress!"

And again the mother was lost in a brooding tender and sad as music, and again, after a while, in her voice of muffled gold, she gently denied Martha. "No," she said; "he must live his life; he must suffer."

There was in the words a finality that tolled like a knell within Martha's heart. The fierce light went out of her eyes, her convulsed arms relaxed; she placed the babe upon the mother's breast and turned away.

"Farewell, poor woman," the mother called after her.

She stood by the manger, and the light of the lantern fell upon her dark eyes, upon the babe's yellow head, glorifying both. "Farewell, happy mother," Martha called back from the door; and went out.

She went out; a heaviness was in her limbs, a dizziness in her brain, and soon she was lost. She wandered with a sense of eternity through endless and tortuous ways plunged in opaque shadow. The moon was out of the sky; the star was gone. And Minnie was not with her. "I

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have lost the baby," she said to herself, "and now Minnie, too, is gone, and I am lost." Then, after a while, to add to her distress, there came to her the wailing of a little child. "The baby, the baby is hurt!" she cried. A yearning tore at her entrails, a yearning to console; to fondle, kiss, caress the sad child; to drink its tears, absorb its pain. She ran to and fro wildly, stumbled, fell, got up again, struck walls, rebounded against obstacles; a tangle of ropes seemed about her feet—and the wail hovered about her, insistent and elusive.

Then, as, despairing, she stood still in an open space, listening, trying to calm herself, the whole world, slowly and distinctly, revolved several times about her, and she fell in a heap at the pivot.

When her head had cleared again, she was lying stretched full length, she knew not where. It was dark, and she was very cold. She was lying upon a bare wood floor. A monotonous and insistent knocking at her temples slowly resolved itself into the ticking of a clock.

Then she knew where she was. She was lying still on the floor of her kitchen. She had not gone out. There had been no babe. She had dreamed.

She had been dreaming, and Minnie—

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She crawled on her knees till her hands struck a box. Inside was a rigid and cold furry thing.

Yes, Minnie was dead. It had been all a dream, and Minnie was dead, truly dead.

She rose to her feet, swaying, confusion doubly confounded; for to her ears even now, unmistakable, there came still the wailing of a babe, the wail of the child of her dream. Thin and vibrant like a narrow shaft of light, the bitter little voice pierced the silence of the night and struck her penetratingly. She stood there long, listening; she went to the table and with trembling hands lit a candle; this in hand she stood again long in the center of the room; then with a low cry she sprang to the door.

Outside, by the sill, was an indistinct bundle. She drew it in. She drew in a basket, and within it were blankets, and within them the doleful clamor. Martha threw off the upper fold. A babe lay beneath.

In truth it was not like the child of the dream. There were no shadows beneath long lashes, upon the mouth was no stamp of the World-Ache. Its solid fists were crammed into its eyes; its pudgy legs were kicking the void; its mouth, distorted with the passion of its soul, was hurling forth into the serene night an acidulated screech of righteous rage. But Martha, on her knees in an

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ecstasy of adoration, her lips upon the red and wrinkled forehead, was whispering, "It is the child, the child; it has been given to me!"

A note, pinned on the blanket, said, "Care for him for Christ's sake; his mother is barred."

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THE BLACK NIGHT

THE weazened apothecary put on his mantle and his hat, wrapped his muffler thick about his thin, dry neck, placed his hand on the door-knob, and then turned his sharp nose abruptly upon the apprentice. "And see that you watch well," he snarled. "Sleep light, and keep an ear on the bell. There's much illness abroad; sleep light and with an ear vigilant!"

"Yes, master," answered Jean the apprentice, humbly.

The little old man's querulous note rose to a sudden fury. "Yes, but you don't!" he piped, shrilly. "You don't, you worthless one! You sleep and snore and snore and snore! As though I did not feed and house and clothe you! Three weeks ago last night Mother Gros came for spirits of camphor and rang and called and could not wake you—!"

"I slept too hard that night, master; it is true I slept too hard; but it won't happen again, it won't happen again," said the pale apprentice.

"See that it won't, see that it won't," pur-

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sued the old man, with acrid voice. He paused again with hand on the door-knob, his small eyes peering about the shop with malevolent scrutiny, peering at the dusty bottles on the shelves, vaguely golden and red in the weak candle-light, at the jars of crystals, the packages of herbs hanging from the black beams. "Humph!" he growled, mollified and yet uneasy. "Everything is well, is it? Everything is well?"

"Everything is well," answered the apprentice; "everything, master. I will watch."

"Well, good-night," said the old man. "Good-night. And sweep early in the morning. Good-night."

His arid hand at last turned the knob. He took one step and seemed to drop into a hole, so black was it outside. For a moment there sounded loud the drumming of the rain upon his cloak, then the door slammed upon his disappearance, setting in motion the bell, which immediately began a rusty ding-dinging.

Jean remained, nose in the air, watching the bell as though he did not like it; then, when finally it was stilled, gave a big sigh and turned away. He lowered the two lamps that burned behind the red and the green bowl in the window, slid the light of his candle inquisitively among the shelves, into the obscure corners of the

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shop, then passed through the small door at the back into his room; into the closet, rather, that served him as room. His narrow cot almost filled it, the narrow cot upon which, after the day's long toil, he stretched in uneasy somnolence, his ear alert to the night-bell, to the bell apt to clamor at the deepest hour of the night at the urgent tug of some pale inhabitant of Penthière.

But it was not time yet even for this torturing half-rest. Keeping on his clothes, Jean sat himself on the cot, his back against the wall, and drew from the folds of his blanket a thick, damp tome that exhaled an odor of age. He opened it out across his knees, placed the candle close upon his pillow, sighed, knit his brows, and began to pore upon the yellow pages. It was an old book of old lore, written in obscure and barbaric Latin, and crammed with the names and properties of drugs and herbs: for several months already he had toiled over it, seeking to stuff into his brain, numb with weariness and long vigil, the endless and fantastic catalogue; and this night the work was harder than ever. The candle sputtered and sputtered, as though continually an invisible hand were attacking it; grains of sand seemed to roll upon his eyeballs; his head was of lead and stubbornly beat back the knowledge he sought to

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place within it. He would read over and over again the same name, the same sentence, and then when, placing over it his hand, he tried to repeat it, he found that he could not, that he had forgotten. "I am not well," he murmured; "my head is not well." And rounding his shoulders, he lowered his eyes closer, as if to drink with them the black characters from the yellow parchment.

Suddenly he started upright, the book slipping down between his knees, and remained thus, immobile, one finger unconsciously raised in a listening attitude. A bell was tolling outside, the big bass bell of the prison of Penthière; its grave murmur thrilled within the small room. "A prisoner being brought in," said the pale apprentice, "another poor prisoner being brought in." But the bell was continuing to toll, and he was counting. "Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Twelve! One condemned to death," he murmured. "A murderer condemned to death. They will cut off his head to-morrow, on the square. O God, to-morrow, on the square!"

He rose, took up the candle, and passing through the shop, opened the door upon the street. A gust of wet wind blew out his light, but he remained there at the door, the rain flagellating his blanched face, and gazed across the

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street toward the big, vague loom of the prison of Penthière. Up high a lantern swung at the hook of a long iron rod; it threw a wan glow upon the upper portion of the great studded portals, upon a part of the gray walls, shining with water. And below, on the lower edge of the halo of pulverized light, Jean discerned the cocked hats and large capes of two gendarmes; and between them a lean, bloused form with bared, shaven head bowed toward hands chained in the form of a cross.

The portals swung open; the great capes, swelling to a whirl of the wind, ballooned off into the court, sucking in with them the manacled figure; the portals swung shut; and the mournful bell, continuing its tolling, seemed to mark the inaudible footsteps, till an interior door having slammed, it stilled suddenly.

Jean closed the door and relit his candle. He was wet. A shiver suddenly sprang from his heels to his hair. "To-morrow, on the square," he said.

And going back to his room, he sat himself on the cot, and reopened the big book. This time, though, he could not. His head swung from side to side a moment; his eyes closed invincibly; he fell sideways upon the mattress in a leaden sleep.

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When Jean awoke, it was to the sound of the night-bell. It was trembling and tinkling in a call at once weak and urgent. He leaped from the cot, picked up the candle, and his eyes, his limbs, his very bones full of sleep, he staggered through the shop to the door. With a fierce gust of rain and wind, a child drove in.

It was a girl, a little girl of misery. Her dress was thin; her feet were bare within her wooden shoes. In the ends of the mean shawl wrapped about her head and knotted beneath her chin she had wrapped inadequately her two hands, red and swollen with the cold, and upon her thin face the raindrops were mixed with tears. "Oh, quick, sir," she gasped, looking at Jean with big fear eyes; "oh, quick; the medicine, the medicine!"

She was holding out a small flagon. Jean took it from her and with blinking eyes read the sticky prescription, then stepped behind the counter to compound the drug. "Who is it for?" he asked, taking down from the shelf a red phial and a box of powders, "who is it for?"

"My mother, my mother; quick, quick, sir!" cried the little girl. "She is all weak and white."

"She is that way often?" pursued Jean, who in the prescription had recognized a powerful stimulant of the heart.

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"Yes, sir; yes, sir. Quick! And then we give her some of the medicine, and she wakes up. But to-night there was no medicine left in the bottle, none at all in the bottle—oh, quick, sir!"

Jean was working as fast as he could; but his hands were numb and his head was leaden. Three times he mistook the proportions and had to begin all over again. But at last he had the flagon filled with the precious stuff. The little girl's hand went out for it and gripped it like a claw. She held out a copper piece. "That is all we have, sir," she said; "that is all we have."

"Go; for the love of the Virgin go, little child; I'll take the two cents," said poor Jean, knowing what terrific scolding would meet on the morrow the news of his generosity, and what eking out of food and sleep would pay for it. "Go, little child!"

And before he had said his last word he was alone within the room, resonant to the lash of the rain upon the glass. The child had vanished in the darkness like a sprite.

Jean locked the door and stood a moment in the center of the shop, swaying with the nausea of interrupted sleep. Then, picking up his candle, he made two steps toward his room, and stopped abruptly, petrified.

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The light, as he swept up the candle from the table to a position ahead of him, had slid in a chromatic scale of color along the bottles, flagons, and retainers upon the shelves; it shone now, fixed, upon a deep-red phial that glowed like a ruby with some inward intensity of its own. Next to this phial was another of the same shape, but containing a liquid of a lighter hue, which was one of the ingredients of the drug he had mixed for the child. And now, as with light held high he gazed upon the phial burning with the deeper red, burning like a ruby with a sort of mysterious malevolence, he thought that he saw its fluid content, behind its black cross-bones, swaying gently, almost imperceptibly, as though of late it had been agitated, as though of late the small vessel had been picked up and tilted, its poison poured—

A cold sweat oozed out upon the brow of the poor apprentice; his fingers began to tremble; he dropped the candle, which went out, and left him in darkness. For an agonized minute he went fumbling about on his knees; and when again he had a light he was reassured for a moment. The wicked red phial glowed now with a fixed flame; its liquor was stilled. He approached and looked close. A cry escaped him. Upon the dusty rotundity of the small vessel he read, as so many

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accusing hieroglyphics, the print of his thumb and two fingers against the glass. "O God!" he cried. "I have given poison to the little child! I have killed the mother of the little child! O God! O God!"

Again the candle slipped from his quaking hands; but he did not stop to relight it. With a last hope of catching the child, of snatching from her hands the terrible thing they so innocently bore, he had bounded to the door, thrown it open, and had flung himself out into the street.

There he stopped a moment, paralyzed by the mere impact of the elements, catching his breath as one drowning. Above, far and humid as a star, the lantern of the prison glimmered; it flashed up intermittently a part of the massive portals, a bit of the walls, glistening with pouring waters. Steadying himself on his thin legs and shielding his eyes with both hands, he peered up and down the street, black beneath the low sky, between the high walls. But there was no one, not a sign of life, not the flitting of a shadow. In the distance a lamp upon a post vacillated faintly. He ran toward it, throwing searching glances into corners, alleys as he passed; he came to it, looked about, passed it. Beyond its small circle of swaying light, he stopped and listened.

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But no clatter of little wooden shoes reached him in the immense patter of the rain; only the hollow thump of his own heart. He retraced his steps, passed the shop, went on down the street, explored narrow ways, alleys, culs-de-sac. But the city was as one deserted of long years, peopled only of the rain and the night; a vast gurgling of waters from slanting roofs, from gutters, spouts, turrets and gargoyles, pierced by long shrieks of wind, filled his ears, his head, whelmed him—there was no other sound. He called. "Little girl; little girl!" he cried. But the words, fiercely snatched from his mouth and torn into bits, were hardly heard by himself. He returned to the shop.

He was wet and very cold, and trembled to the marrow; but he forced himself to some degree of composure, relit the candle, and examined again the bottles. The small one of the vicious red leered acidly at him, throwing toward him its swollen belly with the telltale finger-marks. He looked at the other, the one of lighter hue which he should have used for the medicine of the child, and with a feeling of faint hope and of perplexity he saw that upon it too was the slight trace of his thumb. He remembered that twice, in compounding the drug, he had mistaken his proportions and had had to begin again. Which

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phial had he used last—in that final draught whisked away by the child, pressed tight against her thin little bosom, what had been poured, life or death? He sought to recall his movements, tried to repeat them in pantomime. But he could not; his brain, harassed with long toil, with lack of sleep, with fever and fear, refused to tell him what he asked.

Despairing of the earth, then, Jean had recourse to heaven. Going back to his little room, he knelt against his narrow pallet and addressed the picture of the Virgin tacked up against the wall. "O Virgin Mary," he asked, "make it right. O Virgin Mary, I implore you, make it that I used the right medicine. Do that, I pray thee, Virgin Mary; for I was pure of heart and of intention; I pitied the little girl and her poor mother; but I was very tired. You see, Virgin Mary, I had toiled hard and studied long. And so, I was tired, Virgin Mary, tired! Make it that I used the right medicine, Virgin Mary, please make it right!"

The picture seemed to recede from him, to go back into the wall which rounded behind it in the form of a niche, in the form of a great nave. At the same time it seemed to enlarge, to glow, and to smile, till at last Jean saw only, far in the golden rain of a distant sunset, a glory of

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compassionate womanhood amply mantled in the blue of the sky. "Virgin Mary, please," he murmured.

His head by that time had dropped upon his arms, and he was sleeping. His lips still stirred. "Virgin Mary," they whispered.

And kneeling thus, his head upon his couch, beneath the holy picture, Jean dreamed. He dreamed that his prayer had not been granted; for the night-bell, in renewed persecution, began again to ring; and rising in answer and opening the door upon the night, he was confronted by the large flow of two great mantles. From them simultaneously two grave voices sounded. "Come with us," they said; "you have murdered and must pay the forfeit." The mantles flapped with a noise of thunder; they streamed with cataracts of water, as did the two cocked hats above them.

"I have not murdered," Jean said; "my heart is innocent."

"You have killed by erring, you who should not err," responded the twin voices. "Come with us."

And, submissively, Jean locked the door behind him, and placed himself between the two gendarmes. They three crossed the street in the

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blinding rain, the two great capes slapping Jean's pale face, and stood at the portals of the prison of Penthière, beneath the lantern which winked weak and far through the spume of the elements as a star seen behind flowing clouds. And the big bell began to toll. Jean counted the strokes. "One, two, three," thrice repeated—the signal for one accused of heinous crime. The fatidic number tolled again as he crossed the court, and it came to him once more, muffled and far, as he wound down a black, slimy, and interminable stairway. Suddenly a door, silent as if made of a chunk of the night, closed upon him hermetically, and he was in a dungeon. There, stretched upon a heap of straw, panting beneath the oppression of superimposed walls, he seemed to remain many days—days confounded with night, which were a mere flowing of time in darkness. Then along a street ablaze with sun, through a throng of convulsed faces, they led him to the Tribunal to be judged.

He stood at the bar, between the two gendarmes, and before him, very high, were judges—judges that were black and a judge that was red. They questioned him with a terrible and malevolent persistence, and he could not satisfy them. He wearied himself to the point of death repeating and repeating his story, crying out to them

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the innocence of his heart, the purity of his intentions, his weariness, and his mistake—and they could not understand him. Each time they frowned like deaf men trying to hear, and then began again to question and question, implacably and dishonestly. To one side, on a stand like a pedestal and drawing always his eyes, the ruby phial leered at him redly. Behind him was a sea of livid faces, and the little girl was there. She stood on a chair, her pale face wet with rain and tears, and pointed at him in fixed accusation her little finger, purple with cold. To the right, up a pulpit like that of a church, a man climbed alacriously and began to speak. He wore a long black robe and had the jaws of a wolf. He spoke long and vociferously, waving his long black sleeves like the wings of a great bat. Behind, the white faces howled. Then there was a deep silence. The judges, black and red, leaned toward each other; their heads in a circle, they whispered inaudibly. The heads separated, and then the judge in the center, immensely red in his flowing robe, said shortly, "*A mort.*"

But he did not stop there. Like a machine wound up now, he began to repeat and repeat, with a dry and flat intonation like the sound of two sticks struck against each other, "à mort, à mort, à mort,—to death, to death, to death."

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And Jean, being led away by the two gendarmes, as he cut through the throng that now droned like bees, heard following behind him, in mournful and monotonous reiteration, the words "*à mort, à mort, à mort*—to death, to death, to death."

Outside, it was again night, and again rain and wind. He went heavily over the cobbles, between the thundering, streaming cloaks, and at last stood before the portals of the prison of Penthière. Above him the lantern flickered faintly, like a star very far in the mist. His head was shaven, his shoulders were bent, and his hands were chained together in the form of a cross. And the big bell began to toll. It tolled slowly and interminably, as Jean counted the strokes, the dreary tale with which it received those condemned to die. The portals swung open, and as he crossed the street the bell's clangor fell from on high in brazen blows upon his head; it bent his head toward his hands, chained together in the shape of a cross.

Jean awoke with a great cry of horror, and broke out weeping with joy. For he was still kneeling by his bed, the candle sputtering at his elbow. "O Virgin Mary," he cried, his face bathed with tears; "O Virgin Mary, it was but a

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dream, a dream! It was not true, not true, not real!"

And suddenly he sickened to a drooping of his heart as the limits of his dream became clearer to his mind. He had dreamed; the arrest, the imprisonment, the trial, were a dream. But before that—before! And clear, now, acidly vivid, there came before his eyes the scene before the dream—the coming of the child, the compounding of the drug, the telltale marks on the deadly ruby phial. This was no dream, no dream; it was true!

The poor apprentice slid shudderingly to a huddle on his knees. "O Virgin Mary," he murmured, desolately, "you have not interceded for me. You have forgotten me. You have but doubled the bitter cup. First the agony of the dream, then the agony of reality. The dream, it will begin all over again, the dream. O Virgin Mary, hark; the bell is ringing! The dream begins again, real this time. They are there at the door, the two gendarmes, waiting for me; the judges are at the bar. It begins all over again. O Virgin Mary, hark; the bell is ringing!"

The night-bell, in fact, was again ringing at the door; confounded in his brain at first with the dream-tolling of the prison curfew, it was now sounding in his ear detached and clear, a light

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treble at once weak and urgent. "They are there, waiting for me," said the pale apprentice, and on trembling legs staggered across the shop and opened the door.

The elemental fury that met him was such that for a time he did not know what was before him. Something quick and lithe as a cat had brushed by his legs. He stared at the black void before him—and before him there was nothing else, nothing but the blackness, and in the faint glow of the high lantern a bit of the prison wall flowing with water. A cry behind him made him turn back within the shop, and he faced the little girl.

She was wet, wet, wet; her shawl was a sop, her dress clung like a film along her meagerness; she was crying bitterly, and in her hand, raised high, she held a broken flagon, from which fell still drop by drop a remnant of reddish liquid. Looking at this telltale little vessel, dripping red like a severed head, Jean felt a horrible pain at his heart; his blood seemed to coagulate within it. "It is done," he said to himself; "it is done."

But the little girl was mingling words with her sobs. "I have broken it," she wailed; "oh, sir, I have broken it! Going up the stairs, I broke it! I fell and broke it; and mother is still white and still—"

Jean remained there, candle in hand, petrified,

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uncomprehending, looking at her with somber eyes.

"I have broken it," wailed the little girl. "Going up the stairs, I broke it! I fell and broke it! I spilled the good medicine, and mother is still white and cold—"

Somewhere within Jean a pale, tremulous hope began to flutter like the first heralding hue of dawn after a night of storm. "She did not take it, then," he said, huskily; "she did not take the medicine?"

"I broke it," the little girl sobbed on. "Going up the steps, I broke the bottle. I spilled the good medicine—"

The struggling white thing within Jean was becoming fixed now. Suddenly he understood. His dream, which had taken so long in dream-time, had taken but a few moments on earth. He had slept but a few minutes. Something broke within him like a dam, and then a great glistening river of joy streamed through his being, along his veins, along his nerves, thrilling his flesh, flooding his soul. And kneeling, he placed his arms about the little girl, and kissed her and kissed her and kissed her.

But in another moment he had leaped to his feet and was behind the counter. He seized the ruby phial as it leered at him redly and dashed

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it crashingly to the floor, then set to work with swift, sure gesture. "I'll make you some more, little girl," he said, working calmly, swiftly. "And I'll go with you this time; I'll go with you to your mother, O little girl!"

A wondrous clearness of vision had come to him. He saw before him all life with tender understanding. "'Tis to be alone that is hard," he said; "'tis only loneliness that is hard. We'll unite our poverties, little girl; we'll unite our miseries, O little girl!"

And very low he murmured, "O Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary!"

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WHITE LOVES

"WHEN does a man really begin to love?" some one interrupted.

"God knows," answered Ward.

But Lafarge said, gazing deep into the fire: "You know very well, all of you, that love begins with life."

"Just as we will rehearse war with a wooden gun and maternity with a rag doll, so do we rehearse, while we are small, with cool sweet loves the acrid passions to come.

"These infant loves take as large a place in our childhood as do, in our manhood, what we call our big loves. The difference between them is one of color. These are in pale shimmerings and silvers, in roses and light-blues; the others in reds, black-and-yellows and imperial purples. Also, these are silent and wistful, and about them there trembles a haze of subtle melancholies, of non-fulfilments and regrets.

"I will tell you about mine, for I am not afraid."

Claire was the name of my first love. I was five years old, and bore even then within me the

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vague memory of at least one other affair—of being in a garden, beneath a tree, and watching through a hedge a small maid who also watched me. We stood there long in the hot silence; the sun, leaf-filtered, trickled upon her in yellow rain; and we peered at each other through lucent green tunnels, our eyes round and our lips tight with an external hostility that strove to hide the sweet turmoil within our little hearts.

But Claire I remember clearly. I was going to a small private school chosen by an over-fond mother, and Claire once a day came down from some mysterious upper class, and heard my spelling-lesson. She was lithe and delicate, and her hair of the lightest, lightest gold, light not only of hue but of texture, so that it was less hair than a glow, an emanence of her soul. I don't know how old she was. An assemblage of stern facts force me to the conclusion that she could not have been more than ten. But to me, then, she was Woman itself—woman in all that the word holds of gracious and tender, and discreetly helpful, and adorably severe.

Each morning, exactly at ten, we got up from our desks, my brother Paul and I, and tiptoed into the cool, pearl-gray parlor, and took place stiffly side by side in a corner. After a moment, she would come flowing toward us, her hair an

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aureole. She stood before us, a blue-bound book in hand; her fine little face inclined itself slightly toward us in a maternal movement which made the curls tremble like leaves about her ears. She opened the book, looked into it, and then as if having coaxed from it a secret, closed it again on her detaining finger, gazed down upon us in gentle interrogation, and said "rat," or "cat," while we, elbow to elbow, looked up at her with round, fixed and troubled eyes.

From the intimacy of this little gray room I issued each time as from a chapel. The rest of the day did not matter—it was a mere muddle of incomprehensible tasks hopelessly besmudged. Within me there dwelled the twilight and the incense of that moment; and across my vision, upon stained gothic glass, Claire's fragile and clear silhouette.

I knew my lesson every day. Each word was a bead, to be laid perfect and flawless at her feet. But my brother Paul, probably because lacking my secret incentive, spelled badly. And one morning, as he had floundered and I had starred, she stood a while silent and pensive. Her eyes went from me to the other in impartial questioning, and she said: "How is it that Paul does not know his lesson, while Harry does know his lesson?"

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My heart bounded within me. Here was a real communication; freighted with a significance absent in all the "cats" and "rats" in the world. I stepped forward boldly. "'Tis perhaps," I offered, "because Paul studies in the evening, while I study mine in the morning."

Between her brows came the pleats of a small frown. She shook her head gently; her curls swung as if they had been cherries about her ears. And her eyes were now upon Brother Paul, and I felt suddenly very much alone. "But people say," she objected severely, "that if one studies in the evening, one remembers better; it becomes printed upon the mind while one sleeps."

There was not much to answer to this. Besides, her glance was altogether upon Brother Paul. She smiled. "You bad boy!" she said—to Brother Paul.

I cannot describe the manner of that "bad boy." I know now that there was in it at once a maternal reproach, a solicitude and an indulgence; that there purled beneath, hidden but distinct as the tinkle of a moss-enveloped brook, a discreet amusement; and then, something else, the dawning of an interest, subtle and chuckling and tender. But at that time, unanalyzed, it merely created in me a great hunger; immedi-

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ately, I fastened upon it as something infinitely desirable, which I must have, which must be mine—and yet was not mine, not mine at all, but Brother Paul's.

I never did obtain it; never was it mine. Day followed after day, and Brother Paul floundered; and wistful with an envy so sad it was not an envy, I saw him in the gentle rain of her scolding, within the sweet intimacy of her admonition—whilst I, just a step away, felt desolate, miles removed, lone as if four walls of masonry, with just a little hole in them for bread, as I stood had been raised about me.

My next love was Lily. I do not remember just how the one ended and the other one began. This is true of all my childhood loves. Each simply flows, smoothly, insensibly and without shock, into another. For just as these small loves are rehearsals for future passions, just so do we rehearse in them, by an innocent fickleness, the larger infidelities to come.

If Claire was spun gold and sun, Lily was the purple night. I recall her as a flower, as a wild iris, slight and violet, in the half-dusk of a glade.

For days I had seen her, I think, vaguely, a subtle appearance behind the clear splendor of Claire. Then for a time she disappeared, and

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when again we saw her, she was clothed all in black; we heard that her mother had died.

I can't tell you how immediately, then, all my reveries seized upon her. As a small theme taken by some musician of genius and transmuted into troubling harmonies, so was she, by this touch of Death, enriched to me with wondrous undertones. She was mystery, she was woe, hers the dusky beauty of bereavement. I spied upon her; I fed upon the pallor of her cheeks, the trembling of her lips, the sweet gravity of her gestures. I had visions, one vision especially: I saw her following, alone, an immense funeral chariot bearing her dead mother, while I, from a balcony, wept with intolerable compassion. She was everything to me that was incomparably tragic and—enviable.

Enviable, just that. My spiritual unrest took this form: that she was infinitely admirable, high above me on a pinnacle that left me far below, unutterably alone; and I began to dream of a restored equality, of events which might raise me to her sublime heights, by her side, hand in hand. I imagined family—catastrophes. In justice to myself, I must say that the wildest of my sacrilegious fantasies never wandered so far as to hover about my mother. But my father—dear old man—how little did he guess when he took

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me up on his knees at night, how thoroughly in the heart of his son he lay sacrificed to the success of this sable passion.

My dreams happily had no potency; I never did reach her heights. When next I remember, I am in love with Madeleine.

She was a blue-eyed, soft little thing, square and a bit stolid with the prescience of future maternities. We played on the same hill of the same park, after school, each his or her own game on his or her own side; then, at intervals, rallied headquarters, and while our keepers chatted, stared at each other long and silently. One afternoon, my camp started away earlier than usual, leaving Madeleine and her governess in their accustomed place at the top of the mound. As we went down we came to a spot where worn grass bared a steep, sandy and inviting descent. With a sudden impulse, I hurled myself down in a clownish slide.

Even as I swooped, I heard Madeleine laugh. She was above, invisible to me; the peal came down as from a lark in the sky; it had a penetrating and exquisite quality. It had ended when I reached the level. I loitered, bashful, a moment, a nostalgia at my heart; and then, resolutely, I climbed back and repeated that act which could call forth so precious a manifestation.

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But this time she did not laugh; there was no laugh. I landed at the bottom in a dead, an accusing silence. I tried it again. For days I charged down that slope, carrying with me in the vortex of flying stones and dust a hunger for the treasure, mine for a fleeting instant, and gone. But never again did I hear that delicious, that heavenly laughter.

In our man-life, the big love which, as it were, fixes it, and about which all events are grouped, is announced always, I think, by two, or three, or four lesser loves, timid things, tremulous foreshadowings of the Veiled One, awaiting there ahead in the haze, expectant and fatal.

So it is in child-life. And the little loves of which I have been telling you are but presages of my love for Gertrude.

Also, if we look at our man-life, we see that its current flows unequally through rapids and still pools. We come to periods when Romance and Catastrophe take us by the hand and whirl us in mad dance; then, just as abruptly and inexplicably, we glide into a decade of monotony, smoothly brimful with the somnolence of small duty daily done, resonant with the dripping, as from some invisible stalactite above, of the hours one by one.

So, now, after the first premonitory warnings,

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all of them massed, I confess it, within a year, there comes a long tranquillity of marbles, tops and fights—before I come to Gertrude.

There had been, thank God, a tumble in the family fortune. We had moved across country, and we were in a western town on the shores of a bay of the widest sea. It was a sweet and wholesome place—and full of sun.

Mostly, I remember bright days. We went to school in negligée shirts; our belts were violently striped, and clasped in front with a metal S. We awaited with dreamy patience the quitting hour and its swimming lagoon, and some of us felt deliciously in our pockets notes of excuse from wheedled parents, which would enable us to leave at a quarter to three and see the baseball game. The windows of the classroom were wide open; the geraniums were red in the pots; sometimes we heard distinctly the whir of a swallow flitting by. And the girls wore ginghams of white and pink and faded blues which exhaled, through the room which smelled of pine, a clean coolness of fresh starches.

I think it was this that first attracted me to her. The coolness of her, and the freshness, the soft rustling quality of her. I sat in the back row—place propitious to subtle intimacies and discreet romance. Her name was Gertrude and

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her seat was next to mine. I very seldom looked at her; but always I felt her presence there by me, as in a field, reading, one is aware of a flower near by. The murmur of her garments was in my ears; the zephyr of her gracious turbulence caressed my cheeks; and she had certain brusque, nestling movements which would set my heart a-pound.

A yearning was within me. I wanted to speak to her.

But I did not dare. Every morning I came to school stiff with resolution. The struggle began immediately. I was hat-monitor of my line. At the clink of the teacher's bell, I rose and began my garnering. This movement placed me in the aisle, close to her. I felt about my feet the ripple of her skirt; her head was at the height of my heart; by a slight inclination she could have placed her ear against its precipitate thumping. Here was one of the moments for which, in my bed the night before, on the borderland of sleep, I had determined action. It would be a simple thing, now, to turn a bit and let fall upon her a glance; a glance, and I don't know what; a smile, may be. Maybe a word. Nothing more simple—but it wasn't. For instantly an odious form of catalepsy seized me, jammed my elbows against my ribs, pushed me up the

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aisle with stamping stride like a German soldier on parade, while, as if by magic, hat after hat came to perch like falcons upon my fist.

Once at the end of the line, I had still a chance. I must pivot then, and, my face toward hers, return between the desks to the cloak lobby at the rear of the room. Nothing more easy than to start with eyes fixed high, and as I approached, to lower them gradually till with one last exquisite swoop they settled within the limpid profundity of her own. But I couldn't. I started well. With my eyes fixed high. But thus they stayed. Not the price of an empire, not the bludgeoning of Fate, could have lowered them after that. And conscious of a quickening of my pace as I neared, I went by her like a cannon-ball, and just as gracious. A rustling, the scent of her hair—and I was within the lobby, with my confusion and my nostalgic regrets.

The day, thus early given its character, preserved it to the end; preserved it, if I may use the phrase, increasingly. My agitation grew from hour to hour: an exquisite torture compounded of the sense of her presence, of my successive decisions and my successive renunciations. Chances came to me one by one—passings of drawing-papers, corrections of spelling-slips, all the many small routines of class-room which

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offered communication. But each, just at the critical moment, suffocated with panic, I allowed to slip by. And the ringing of the dismissal bell announced the final binding of a sheaf of dead promises, of unappeased yearnings and dreams gone to wreck.

You would not believe me if I told you how long this continued. More than months—years! There were two periods—one during which we were in the same class, the other during which we were not even in the same school. But it was all the same. Silent longings, complicated preparations—and abandonments. Once I printed for her one hundred cards that bore her name in gothic type, working in the secrecy of our basement after school-hours, with a perverse toy printing press. It took me weeks, and incredible toil and sweat and patience. But when finally I pushed over the edge of my desk the precious packet, intending to land it at her feet in delicate offering, it fell the first time wrong side up, so that it did not show her name. And the second time it burst open with so complete a scattering of its contents that, disconcerted, I whisked them up ere any one had seen. And the third time, it was not she, alas, who saw, but Pete Robbins; he sat ahead of me and picked up the thing himself, coldly and maliciously.

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For many days my heavy tribute paid his corrupt silence.

During the second period of this affair, we were apart. A catastrophe (she had all the graces, but was not studious as a monk) had left her one class behind me. Our school had no grammar grade. My promotion placed me in a grammar grade—of another school. And when, months later, she came tagging after me, some arbitrary regulation, mechanically applied, placed her again in a school that was not mine.

But my passion, a pure and an idealistic one, only increased with distance. My love grew. She was there always, in some misty pleasing recess of my consciousness, a lavender presence, low-toned, appealing and tender.

In body I saw her at rare intervals. She would come from far beneath low trees, down a long walk splotched with sun. And I, prey to an intolerable internal commotion, fled in a diagonal to the other side of the street, from which, turning after a while, I contemplated her again, as she disappeared down the long walk, beneath the low trees, in the golden splotches of the sun.

The games of the Rose Street Baseball League brought us near again for a last supreme trial.

The Rose Street Baseball League had been

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established by my comrades and myself in close imitation of the professional league of the state. I was one of the three pitchers of the Magnolia Stars. The grounds were a vacant lot on the northeast corner of Twelfth and Rose streets. And on the southeast corner of Twelfth and Rose, behind a hedge of geraniums, a green lawn and a screen of blue eucalypti, stood the house where Gertrude lived.

I shall always remember the first game. I was second man up. As bat in hand I swaggered toward the plate, I threw a glance across the street, and caught sight of a white flutter against the green of the lawn. She was over there, beneath the trees; over the red geraniums she was watching us—watching me!

I played execrably. My arms and legs seemed suddenly to have wrested from my brain an absurd independence. They were as if tied by strings to another distinct and hostile will. When I bade them act, they remained dead with a leaden immobility; then, when I least wanted it, they broke out abruptly in inane and perfectly ineffective gesticulations. I struck out. When I came to pitch, I "walked" the first three men and, trying to catch one of these at third, hit my own shortstop in the head—upon which, to the wave of our alert manager, I took the bench

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amidst the hoots and jeers of a boot-high multitude.

I did not play again for several days, but lolled on the bench. My attention was not on the game. On the other side of the street, behind the red geraniums, I could see her, fluffy and white against the lawn's deep green. Our grounds had no back-stop, so that always one of the men of the side that was in stood out in the street, retrieving the balls that escaped the catcher. Often, that boy would be very near her, and once Mickey O'Toole had rushed into the very garden like a savage, dousing, as he passed, his hot bristles beneath the sprinkler which bedewed the flowers. On the third day, after trying it several times and failing because at the critical moment my voice lost all resonance, I managed to offer my services audibly, and went out on the street—toward her.

At first, I remained by the nearer curb. I was agitated. The first ball I seized slipped twice out of my trembling fingers. But little by little I gained assurance—an assurance that astonished me. I made show of my black uniform, its white stockings and its white cap; I exaggerated the pouncing quickness of my movements. Gradually, I backed across the street, toward her.

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I could not see her; but deliciously I knew that she was near, leaning on the gate, between the flowers.

I meant to pick up a ball there against the gate, at her feet. And rising, I meant to turn my eyes up to her, and speak.

I knew even what I would say. The first time I rose and looked at her, I should say:

"Hot work, isn't it?"

And the second time:

"But *you*'re all nice and cool!"

Which would establish a communication that would last through life.

The balls came rolling. Cunningly, I backed and backed. I could feel her eyes like two needles of sun upon my neck; slight stirrings made my heart leap.

Then a ball came bounding high, hurdled the curb as a trout its ladder, and nestled in a tuft of grass against the gate. I turned and made for it. I stooped, and right here, at the apex of my resolution, I heard upon me my breeches slowly rip.

So that I never did speak to Gertrude. That odious and absurd accident was my final defeat. For the rest of the baseball season I had not the courage to play at Twelfth and Rose. I never could make up my mind to be there again. And

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never was I able to pass her on the street. As far as I could see her, a color beneath the low arch of the trees, I would flee, unmanned. And finally—perhaps that shock had started a deadening process—she slipped away from me gradually and insensibly, till she had drifted into a retrospective haze, faint and soft and gray, back there on the horizon of the past.

Two years passed. I was a high school lad. One day I heard that she was dead.

I remember this very well. It was at recess, and a few of us were practising football passes. The two guards, who had little to do, began to chat over the crouching center's head. "Remember Gertie O'Neill," said one, "who lived at Twelfth and Rose, and went to Washington School?"

"No," said the other. "Oh, yes, I do! A pretty little thing, wasn't she? Wore her hair in braids."

"Yes," said the first. "Well, she died day before yesterday."

"No—you don't say! Too bad—she was a little queen, wasn't she?"

I went on passing the ball. But afterward I walked over to a bench, and remained there for some time after the bell had rung and the yard was empty.

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All the past was sliding by. I sat again next to her at school.

Suddenly I discovered that I had never abandoned my desire; that all this time when I had thought her forgotten, something deep and constant within me had been quietly waiting. Waiting for the sure day which should bring us together, at last, in the realization of my stubborn dream.

The yard was very silent. A little bell rang above, and a class burst into song.

Something else tormented me now—an unreasonable but firm conviction that if once I had spoken to her she would not have died; that if, in lack of that odious and absurd accident at the baseball game, I had spoken to her, she would not now be dead. "If I had spoken to her, she would not have died," I repeated to myself. "If I had spoken to her she would not be dead."

I told you when I began, did I not, that these loves of childhood are white; and that a haze trembles about them, of melancholies and regrets!

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GOD'S JOB

IT was John Roundtree who came to me with this singular amplification of a simple happening. John has a home, and it is from him I have all I know of Home. He disappears within it for long periods, as a fish into the profundities where it really belongs; and then, I'll find him of an afternoon at the club, a trailing of the daze of emergence still on his face, and his soul filled to overbrimming with some quiet, deep and heavy experience. Sitting there, the other day, his clasped hands on the top of his cane, his knees a bit apart (for domesticity has somewhat thickened him), he told me this, speaking, I think, rather to himself than to me:

I have just been through something—something natural, I suppose, yet rather harrowing—and it has turned my thoughts upon the character of God's work.

It happened in this way:

You know, of course, about my family; and you know about Myrtle, the smaller of my two little girls. She is a round, chubby, tender baby with big, blue eyes; they have in them a peculiar

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quality, at once of questioning and of humble acceptance. That child loves me with a love beyond that of any other member of the family. Phyllis, her elder sister by two years, loves me well enough (she will run to me from as far as she can see me, leaving Myrtle toddling timidly far behind). And so, of course, does Elizabeth, my wife. But in the affection of these two there is an appreciation of me, I often think, a bit too humorous. Beneath everything, I am to them a good deal of a joke. *The* joke, perhaps. While to Myrtle, I am the admirable, the adorable—the God. I discovered this when she was two years old. Going by her carelessly in the hall, I felt my hand seized as it passed, and upon it the pressure of her warm, soft lips. She has done this often since. Whenever I pass her, and no one is about, she is apt to seize my hand and to kiss it—in a sort of secret and fervent communication.

Well, Myrtle had been ailing slightly for several months. Her small soul seemed raw; she would break out weeping often, and sob long, with little provocation. So Elizabeth, my wife, took her to the family physician, who passed her on to a specialist, who decided that there were parasitic growths in the air-passages, and that they, as well as the tonsils, should be removed.

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A very usual operation, I understand. And Elizabeth, with that implacability in decision which woman shows within her sphere and often leaves man gasping, arranged to have this done the very next morning.

They came back at noon, she and the child, from the doctor's office, Elizabeth all tense with resolution, Myrtle hot-cheeked with the ordeal she had been through; and Elizabeth said very loud: "Yes, it is all arranged; the doctor is coming to-morrow morning, with his two assistants, to make Myrtle all well and happy again."

She set to work immediately. One of the bedrooms was thoroughly cleaned and washed; bowls were sterilized, water boiled; a surgeon's box arrived, mysteriously sealed; a long operating table was improvised; little by little the room, visible in flashes through opening and closing doors, took on an aspect cold and hard and white.

Meantime, Myrtle was being left to me.

She had come back with hot cheeks from the medical visit. She had been hurt a bit, and much frightened; she must have felt now, as children feel, vaguely but with sudden penetrating pangs, the ambiance about her of preparation and trouble. So that the expression in her blue eyes, at once of questioning and of humble acceptance, was very big.

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She did not go out and play with Phyllis. Instead, she remained indoors and read her Peter Rabbit book.

The Peter Rabbit book tells in pictures the adventures of Peter Rabbit on the farm of Mr. Grouch. It was the first book to arouse her delight; and since that day, carefully preserved at the bottom of her doll-trunk, it is Myrtle's solace in moments of spiritual throes, her consolation in trouble, working thus through a stirring of the maternal tenderness big already in that baby body. Whenever she has been scolded; or has given way to the passion that lies deep within her outward placidity; or, because she is too little, has been skilfully maneuvered out of some play by superior Miss Phyllis, she gets the book out of the trunk, huddles in a lone corner, opens it across her knees, and plunges into its illusion.

This she did now. But with a difference in her manner. There was in it less of natural fleeing to a refuge than of conscious seeking of it. All the afternoon she was on the floor in her room, propped in a corner, turning slowly page after page, dwelling very long on each. But at times I found her by me, holding my hand wistfully; to my encouragement, she climbed up on my knees and snuggled close, her warm cheek

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against mine. Her eyes stole to the closed door of the ominous room. But something within her, a subtle delicacy refusing to doubt my silence, or a shrinking from knowledge that might be terror, held her from questioning me—though I knew.

By evening, we decided we should have to tell her something, in order to forestall a possible panic at the critical moment. At dinner, speaking in turn and as casually as possible, Elizabeth and I, we tried to prepare her.

"You know," said Elizabeth, "to-morrow the doctor is coming, the big, black doctor. He is big and black; but he is kind. You'll be good to him, won't you, Myrtle? You won't cry, will you? Because, if you cry, you will make him feel bad."

Myrtle looked at her with her large eyes, in which the question was now supreme, and did not answer.

"He'll come," Elizabeth went on, "and make you all well. All strong and well. So you'll never have sore-throat."

Still the big eyes with the rippling fear-light in them.

"Do you know how he is going to do it?" I asked, with an archness of which I felt immediately a dim disgust.

"No," she said, very low.

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"Well, you'll lie down on a table, just as if in bed. Then—whiff—and you'll be asleep. And when you wake up, you'll be all well."

She considered this gravely for a while, and longing for still more assurance, said: "I'll go to thleep, and then be well? He won't *hurt* me? He won't put a big iron thing in my mouf?"

"No, no, no!" Elizabeth cried passionately—from which I knew that she had had this morning her trial. "Oh, no, baby! You'll simply go to sleep, and then wake up, and be all well."

Myrtle gave a little sigh. "All right," she said.

But Elizabeth immediately saw, and I saw, that after all we had not done what we needed to do. And we had to go on.

"You won't cry, then, when the doctor comes in, Myrtle? And you won't cry when he puts you on the table? And when he puts a funny thing over your face, you won't cry will you, but just take a big, long breath and go to sleep?"

"Somethin' on my face?" said Myrtle, now coming back in doubt, and tremulously, to the subject which had seemed settled.

"Yes," said Elizabeth with artificial lightness. "A little tin thing. You know the strainer hanging from the spout of the tea-pot? Well, a little

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thing like that. The doctor will put it on your little nose—and then you'll go to sleep. Right away!"

"And it won't hurt me?"

"No! No! No!"

She was looking down, a bit sidewise, as if at the floor. Suddenly, her eyes were again upon us. "And when I'm athleep——" she began; and stopped.

"What is it—when you are asleep?"

"He won't put any big iron thing in my throat and hurt me?"

"No, no!" cried Elizabeth again with passion.

"Of course not," I assured heavily—and was seized a second time with dim discomfort.

"You'll be near, mamsie, won't you?"

"Yes, dearie, I'll be right close."

"And papa—will he be in the house?"

"I'll be in the next room, and I'll come as soon as you wake up."

She seemed satisfied, and we felt her, as though it were a physical act, put away the thing from her.

"So, when the doctor comes, you'll be good to him, and won't cry; and you'll lie down on the table nicely, and breathe hard when they put the tea-strainer on your face," Elizabeth recapitulated.

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"Yes," she agreed, almost with indifference, and turned calmly to her dessert.

But as soon as we were through, she climbed upon my knee and asked for the story of the little girl in the well. The story of the little girl in the well is, like the Peter Rabbit book, an opiate and a consolation.

As she was going to bed with Phyllis, she turned for an instant at the door; "You'll come and say good-night to me, won't you?" she begged, looking at me.

I answered that I would.

"I'll get undressed, and then you'll hear me call, and then you'll come, won't you?"

After a while, I heard her call and went into the room. Phyllis was already asleep; but Myrtle had her Peter Rabbit book all ready, spread open on the coverlet.

We went through it devoutly, twice; as slowly and lingeringly as if it had been the first time. Then, she said: "Now, you can put out the light."

I reached the wall with my right hand, snapped out the light, and we were in the darkness, close. Then, I felt her small arms wrap themselves about my head, and draw it up against her little chest.

I remained there long, that big head of mine upon her little breast, listening to her heart,

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which galloped softly. Then, when her breathing had become slow and regular, I freed myself carefully.

When we woke, the morning was bright at the windows. Phyllis, already dressing, was chirping in her room; but Myrtle, usually the first one up, remained in her bed, very quiet, till her mother routed her out with overcheerful energy, and sent her out in the garden. I watched her a moment through the window. There was dew on the roses, and above, bird-notes like dew. But in the filtered sunlight there must have been, I suppose, a shadow. She stood uncertainly on the gravel walk, turned, came back up the steps, and when I went into her room a quarter-of-an-hour later, there she was on the floor, huddled in her corner, reading her Peter Rabbit book.

We sent Phyllis out for a walk with the maid, and waited.

We had, of course, gotten up absurdly early. The waiting was long. Bells rang in false alarms—a futile telegram from a futile person; the baker; the butcher. Gradually, our throats tightened. Once in a while, we looked at each other, Elizabeth and I, and our eyes said: "Aren't we silly; about a perfectly simple and natural matter; a little thing, perfectly safe." Then, even as we looked, smiling, we felt our

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lips go white. And Myrtle, in her corner, read her Peter Rabbit book.

We undressed her and put on her a very white night-gown.

The bell rang. This time there was a certain quality of decision in it, and three men in black strode along the hall to the operating room.

Myrtle was standing on her bed, so that her head was level with mine. Her eyes dilated; her jaw dropped a little; then, her eyes were again steadfast into mine. "Tell me the little-girl-in-the-well thory," she begged, a pleading hurry in her tone.

The door between us and the operating room flashed open and shut again—and during the flash we had time to see that the black men were now all white. White to the feet, and white-turbaned. Myrtle drew me close.

I told the story of the little girl in the well. She had one hand on each of my shoulders, and her eyes were fixed upon mine. But in spite of my efforts and in spite of her efforts, I felt at times her small mind escaping us in a fluttering inspection of the sounds behind the door.

It flashed open and shut again, and we had seen, near the long white table, a small white table, and upon it a glitter of polished steels, and in the midst of this glitter, prominent as a

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crown among lesser regalia, a terrible trap-like thing.

Myrtle began weeping softly, but stopped immediately as I gathered her up. "Tell me another thory, quick!" she whispered urgently.

I told her the story of the six little boys and the six little squirrels.

For several minutes there had been a silence on the other side of the wall. The door now opened wide, and Elizabeth came in, swiftly and smoothly. "Come, Myrtle, darling," she said, going with directness toward the child. "We'll make you all well now."

But I felt within the small body against me a smothered crumbling chug, as if something had given way, had broken; and suddenly our ears, our heads, our nerves were vibrating to her high, desperate cry.

Elizabeth, white and firm, took her strongly from my treacherously yielding hold, and bore her toward the door.

I remained motionless there, petrified within the live whirl of the scream; I saw the child, swept away, throw toward me her imploring eyes, her beseeching arms, while I remained motionless there.

The door closed, and Elizabeth was standing by my side.

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We stood there side by side, yet apart, stiffened against each other by some strange, irrational hostility. Within, the high cry had fallen; Myrtle was sobbing. Her voice climbed to another fear-shriek, probably as the mask was clasped upon her. The cry gurgled, smothered, weakened, sank—then detached itself and floated far away, here, there, everywhere, nowhere, the disembodied cry of the chloroformed, a wandering will-o'-the-wisp of Pain.

I felt Elizabeth's hand reach toward mine, and seized it; but still our eyes stared away from each other.

Then, that tenuous, etherealized plaint swooped down to a wild material ache; twice it did this. "They're not giving her enough; they're not giving her enough," whispered Elizabeth fiercely, and our hands twitched as we thought of the over-prudent hand of the anesthetizer, we to whom everything that is desirable was now oblivion, a cessation of pain, tons and tons and tons of sleep.

At last there was a silence. Such a silence as follows the realization of murder done. The door opened; the surgeon stood on the sill and said: "All right!" Elizabeth pounced within.

I remained where I was, sickened with a vague distaste. When I went in, the men were gone;

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the room had been cleared and was no longer white and cold. Myrtle was in bed, her cheeks flushed, and she was crying softly to herself, the end of a storm of tears. When I had come near, very abruptly she caught my head in her two arms, in a repetition of the strange gesture of the preceding night, and drew it up against her little chest.

This affected me immensely. I don't know what I had expected as just—a rebellion, a revolt, a tension. But this acceptance—it was hardly bearable.

I questioned her after a while, curiously.

"You see, it didn't hurt!" I cried in affected triumph.

She said: "My throat hurts awfully." Just like that, simply, without a vestige of reproach: "My throat hurts awfully."

I could remember us saying: "And you'll wake up and be all well."

"But it didn't hurt," I went on, "when—when you were asleep. While you were asleep, it did not hurt."

"He hurt me," she said, uncomplainingly, as if stating a detached fact, "when he put the iron thing in. You know, the big iron thing."

I knew it immediately—only too well. Right there, I had the terrible vision of it, crammed

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down her soft throat—before she was asleep, before she was quite asleep.

Very clearly, I heard our voices saying, before: "You'll lie down and go to sleep, that's all; and wake up and be all well."

"Kiss me," I said tentatively, not yet able to believe.

She took my head again in her two hands, and kissed me passionately on the lips!

Then, that vague, vast distaste, undulant as a haze within me, became something very sharp and very clear; a sense of cruelty and deceit and of guilt.

Of guilt. I sat there fighting the thing, and it would not down. Myrtle had called for Martha, her oldest rag doll; carefully smoothing its disreputable gown, she had slipped it beneath the covers by her side, and was sleeping now, its head tenderly within the hollow of her enveloping arm.

I would say to myself:

"Of course it was for her own good."

(It was. There was and is no doubt of that. Her cheeks are red and firm now, and she is happy all day long.)

I would say: "We *had* to take the responsibility."

(And we had. If not we, who; who?)

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"Out of our superior knowledge."

(That was it. We had superior knowledge.)

"And use our superior strength. And deceive. It was the only way."

("It was the only way," something within me echoed, desolately.)

But this litany done, I would find myself facing still the clear sense of guilt.

I heard our voices saying: "You'll go to sleep, and then wake up, and be all well."

And I saw the child, torn from my treacherous releasing hold, whisked away, arms supplicating, into a cavern of glittering things—abandoned, forsaken there—and tortured.

I could say: "It was for her own good. We had to take the responsibility. Out of superior knowledge. And use our superior strength. And deceive—"

Yet, the sense of guilt remained clear and steadfast within me.

"Why?" I asked myself, "Why?" And could find no answer.

It was then it occurred to me, abruptly, that this, my temporary fix, must be God's fix all of the time.

What we had done to Myrtle, he must do to all. What we had done once, he must do all of the time—a million times a day.

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He must take the responsibility. Out of his superior knowledge. And use his superior strength. And deceive.

Take blind souls, and torture them. For their good. For their health and their glory.

I don't see how he can bear it.

I do, in a measure, when he deals with the protesting, with the Rebels and all who revolt. But when it comes to those that accept, that do not question, to the humble and the tender, to those who take his head in their puny arms and draw it to their little breasts—

I don't see then how he can stand it.

I don't envy God his job.

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